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The Miser.

The Miser,

Ricketicketack,

And the Poor Gentleman.

Three Tales in one Volume.

By HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

Philadelphia . . . J. B. Lippincott & Co.

Baltimore . . . Murphy & Co.

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Rickerickstraw;

AND

The Poor Gentleman.

THREE TALES

From the Original Flemish of

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Preface to the American Edition.

THE "Miser," "Ricketicketack," and "The Poor Gentleman," are presented to the reader in this volume, the latter for the first time in our language.

It would not be fair to say that "THE MISER" *reminds* us of "The Crock of Gold," for its incidents are altogether different; yet we may remark that the absorbing interest with which we perused Mr. Tupper's startling work was entirely revived as we read the thrilling narrative of M. Conscience. Painful and tragic as are many of the facts, they form only a dark and stormy background to relieve the gentler or more winning traits of human nature; so that the whole performance produces the effect of a delicious music, in which the sweetness of a *soprano* is made more eloquent by the harmonious depth and power of a *bass*. We know few stories in which avarice, with its debasing tendencies and destructive results, is displayed in a more masterly manner.

"RICKETICKETACK" will be read at a single sitting; for no one who begins the story will lay down the book till he has finished the last line. It is a delicious summer-evening

dream, imbued with all the rich tints of sunset over a quiet landscape. Indeed, it reminds us of one of those beautiful but rare pictures by the Flemish school in which it might be supposed that Cuyp furnished the scenery, while Teniers, in his happiest mood, contributed the figures. Unlike many of M. Conscience's stories, it deals with the delicate emotions of the *manly* heart; and, at the same time that it portrays the sufferings of a friendless girl, it paints the fervor with which the love of his lost child haunts, stimulates, and sustains a father through all the trials of a soldier's life.

The Parisian critics of "THE POOR GENTLEMAN" (at the head of whom, in admiration, is Pontmartin) have declared it to be, in its peculiar line, the most striking of M. Conscience's stories. The struggles of human pride and human goodness, of ancestral vanity combined with gentle worth in a man, and of innocence and suddenly-aroused resolution in a woman, are delineated with a pathos, humor, minuteness, and elaborate finish which ought to place this work among the select favorites on every reading-table in our country. "The Poor Gentleman" is a story which we can readily imagine would have delighted the heart of Hogarth; and we must lament that there is no inheritor of the Englishman's genius to illustrate it with that entire sympathy which ought always to exist between an author and his artist.

Baltimore, Oct. 1856.

THE MISER.

CHAPTER I.

It was winter. The snow covered the whole face of nature, like the pall upon a maiden's bier; moors and fields lay in deep repose; every thing slept, but in a slumber so peaceful, so full of promise for a joyous awakening, that the scene, monotonous and lifeless as it was, made the heart beat high with instinctive gladness.

And what wonder? Above, in the clear blue vault, brightly shone the winter's sun, showering down his beams upon that stilly world; from the endless expanse each flake flashed back the rays, so that the whole showed as bestrewn with thousands of sparkling gems; and so joyously glistened the brightness that resulted from this reflection, that it was as if the snow had been informed with life and colors of its own.

Far and near the whiteness was unbroken—for church, village, and farm were hidden, as it were, under the folds of earth's wintry robe; unbroken but by the sombre foliage of the fir-trees,

which reared their dark green pyramids from amid the snow, and stood motionless there, like so many sentinels keeping guard over a sleeping army.

But if the world of nature had thus enveloped itself in silence and repose, the world of man toiled on with unremitting diligence. From every farm, from every cottage, came forth noises and voices in endless variety. Here the threshing-floor resounded heavily to the flail, there the corn-mill pursued its impatient clatter; farther on might be heard the sharp, rapid blows of the flax-crusher or the dull plash of the churn.

And above all these the pleasant song of the maidens and sharp whistle of the men, and then the neighing of the horses, the lowing of the cows, the sweet and plaintive bleat of the sheep.

Oh, ineffable song of praise, which ascends to God, and tells him that his creatures rejoice in their labors and thank him for their lot upon earth!

Nevertheless, one house there was which, amid this Babel of varied sounds, remained dull and silent as the grave. It stood some few hundreds of yards apart from the body of the village, and was evidently the remnant of a convent or monastery, of which the greater portion had been destroyed by fire or the hand of man; for the broken foundations of massive buildings might still be traced in the ground all round about.

This habitation consisted simply of one wing

of the old buildings which had been left standing, with its Gothic windows rudely bricked up with fragments from the ruins. House and garden were entirely enclosed within high walls, supported by projecting buttresses.

But it was not all this that made the passer-by stay his steps beside this singular house and led him off into a melancholy train of thought.

There lay over this mysterious abode—pitiful remnant of antique prosperity and power—a tone of decay and desolation which pained the beholder to the very heart. All about it the ground seemed given up to waste. Great heaps of rubbish and yawning vaults rendered it almost inaccessible. Time and weather had sorely worn the walls, which were here and there traversed by long fissures; the buttresses were in many places partially broken away; some of them even lay prostrate on the ground at the foot of the wall which they should have supported. Nowhere could be observed a trace of any attempt at reparation or maintenance.

From the stillness which reigned here, one should have judged this house wholly uninhabited, had it not been for a beaten track through the snow which led from the door in the direction of the village till it was lost in a broader pathway. With closer observation, the smaller prints of a woman's foot might be distinguished from among the larger impressions.

Within, under a projecting mantel-piece, in total

silence, their feet on the hearth, their heads sunk between their shoulders, as though chilled into insensibility by the cold, sat two persons over against one another. The one was an old man with gray hairs, sunken eyes, and pale hollow cheeks, his back bowed with years, his hands, whenever he moved them, tremulous with feebleness. The other was a man of some forty years of age, still in the full vigor of life, whose irregular features bore upon them a strange and inexplicable expression, which at the first sight could hardly fail to inspire distrust or aversion. His little gray eyes were buried as it were beneath a high forehead and heavy overhanging brows, and gleamed out from their recesses like glow-worms in a dark night; his spreading nostrils vibrated with each breath he drew; his mouth was wide, cleft almost to the middle of the cheek; and the unpleasant smile that played upon his thick lips told of gluttony and vices more odious still. His countenance thus bore upon its upper half the expression of unprincipled cunning, not without somewhat of acute intelligence too; in its lower half, that of blind animal appetite; and the result of the combination produced a whole sufficiently ill-favored in its material forms, but doubly so by its moral significance.

The room in which they sat, and every thing about them, accurately harmonized with the aspect and temper of the two silent figures. It was a vaulted chamber, spacious and lofty, but

hardly more than half lighted by a window high up in the wall and closely barred with iron, which, in default of glass, gave freest ingress to wind and rain. An excessive want of cleanliness reigned throughout. The floor was covered with a layer of earth; cobwebs hung down from the ceiling and thickly festooned the walls; in the dark corners lay cast-away objects of the most heterogeneous description, without a use, and almost without a form, among which worn-out shoes prominently figured; while the few articles of household use which here and there hung against the walls, or stood ranged upon the chimney-piece, were all so thickly covered with dust that it was plain enough they had not for years and years been moved from their places.

Both the men, closely muffled up as they were in garments miserably patched indeed, but of the thickest and heaviest materials, seemed pierced with cold to the very marrow; and a strange spectacle it was to see them stretching out their feet to the solitary peat-sod which lay smouldering on the hearth, at the same time bending over it, so that no ray of caloric should escape them on its way up the chimney, and even intercepting with outspread hands the scanty steam which issued from an earthen pipkin placed in the ashes beside this apology for a fire.

The old man sat motionless, his eyes fixed upon the hearth; his companion, though he too but

rarely changed his position, yet sufficiently indicated by the frequent blinking of his cunning eyes that he was deeply occupied in thought upon matters of the utmost interest to him. It was as though he was impatiently awaiting the old man's rousing up, meanwhile anxiously spying out the slightest indication of emotion upon the fleshless and lifeless countenance. At last he took up the iron blowpipe and directed a vigorous blast upon the peat-sod, so that a blue flame rose up from the hearth.

With feverish haste the old man caught his hand. "What are you about, Thys [*Matthias*]? he exclaimed, in a tremulous voice; "take care! isn't the peat soon enough gone, that you must blow it to pieces? Are you cold, then?"

"Not at all," answered Thys; "but it's striking eight by the church clock, so it's time for us to get our breakfast."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, I thought a good sup of something warm would do you good, Uncle Jan."

"Warm food weakens the stomach," murmured the old man; "and the peat, too, is so terribly dear!"

Meanwhile Thys had set the pipkin on the table, and put a spoon into his companion's hand, who kept stirring and blowing as though sorely afraid of burning his mouth. To judge by the eager smile of appetite with which he inhaled the steam, the pottage seemed much to

his mind; yet, in good truth, the appearance of it was any thing but inviting, it being, in fact, neither more nor less than a mess of warm water with great bits of black bread swimming about in it.

But at the first spoonful which the old man put to his lips he cast a look of reproach on his companion.

"Thys, Thys!" he exclaimed, "I cannot think how it is you are so desperately fond of salt!"

"Only five grains, Uncle Jan!"

"And what's that I see?—grease? You've been putting butter to it! So you are determined to bring me to the workhouse in my old days? Thys, Thys! that was not well done of you!"

"You're blaming me quite without cause," answered Thys; "Cecilia used the pipkin yesterday to warm up her potatoes in, and put a great piece of butter to them."

"A great piece of butter!"

"I could have washed and wiped out the pot, to-be-sure."

"No, no! that would never have done!"

"And I took good care not to do so; now we have some good of it too, instead of its being thrown away."

"I was wrong, Thys; you're an excellent fellow, and, if I leave a trifle behind me when I come to die, be sure you shall see that I've not forgotten you for your care and attachment to me."

At this moment a gentle knocking was heard

at the door, followed by a paternoster distinctly repeated, though in a faint and tremulous voice.

"There's Jan the mason's widow again," muttered Thys, with a gesture of annoyance; "she's never got any thing yet, and every day she keeps on coming. I wonder what she means by it. It's just as though she was hired to worry us."

"What! again?" exclaimed the old man; "give, give! always the same story! Just get up, Thys, and pack the idle hussy away."

Now the door was gently opened, and a poor woman, thin and faded, leading by the hand a little shivering girl, stood upon the threshold. She went on with her prayer; else she spoke not.

Thys meanwhile had risen from his seat, and, roughly and rudely addressing himself to the woman,—

"Off with you!" he cried; "there's nothing given away here. I should like to know what you're always sneaking about this house for? to see if there's any thing to steal, I suppose, as your'e too idle to work. Off! off! and be quick about it!"

The beggar-woman at once turned away to leave the inhospitable dwelling; but, as she went, whether out of impatience to have her gone or out of pure brutality, Thys gave her little girl so violent a push behind that the poor child fell forward into the snow and immediately began to cry aloud. With flashing eyes and uplifted threatening finger, the mother exclaimed,—

"God will repay you this, you wretch!"

But with scant heed to her malediction, and with an ugly smile upon his countenance, Thys violently slammed the door behind her and returned to his place at the table.

After a vigorous litany of imprecations upon all thieves, beggars, and idlers, the worthy pair proceeded quietly with their breakfast. At last the old man inquired,—

"Well, Thys, how do you like your breakfast?"

"It is excellent, Uncle Jan. And yet there is poor misguided Cecilia says it's only fit for a dog."

The expression of his eyes made it sufficiently evident that it was not by accident that he introduced Cecilia's name.

"I'm sadly afraid, Thys, that Cecilia's straying every day farther and farther away from the right path. She gets dainty, dressy, extravagant."

"Indeed and indeed, I'm sorry to say it is so, Uncle Jan. I don't often speak about it, for Cecilia's just the spoilt child here; she may do what she pleases,—eat butter, wear fine clothes, pile up the fire, give away money. I really pity you, Uncle Jan; and sometimes, when I think of all the trouble your blind indulgence for her may bring upon you, it quite frightens me. Though, indeed, I pity our poor Cecilia much more, who is led away, and, as you say, every day gets farther and farther astray."

"How much is there left of the butter we

bought last week?" asked old Jan, his thoughts wandering on to another subject.

"The half-pound is wellnigh out again," was the reply.

"Out again! Why, then, we shall have to lay out another half-franc for her extravagance! Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Yes, to-morrow, Uncle Jan."

Thys saw with secret joy how the old man, with a gesture of despair, pressed one hand to his forehead, and how his whole frame was convulsed with irritation. A singular smile passed over his ill-favored countenance as he went on:—

"Yes, believe it or not as you will, Uncle Jan, but it's just the plain truth,—Cecilia's getting thoroughly spoiled with Mother Ann. They give her all sorts of titbits, make up a fire fit to burn the house down, and scoff and sneer at you and me, to set her against us. That Cecilia is never at home and goes on as though money grew on your back,—that's all the widow's doing; but the hypocritical set know very well what they're about;—they're laying out money on a venture that they reckon will bring them in some thousands per cent."

"But, Thys, Mother Ann is poor. At her husband's death she could barely raise the money to pay for his funeral; to-be-sure she would needs have an oak coffin, and four masses said for him; and now you talk of money extrava-

gance, and laying out on a venture. I don't understand you."

"See, Uncle Jan," replied the other, with well-feigned grief, "I can't be silent any longer; it has been too long on my conscience already. And besides, my affection for you, my benefactor, obliges me——"

"What does this strange beginning mean? You make me quite tremble."

"And well you may, poor Uncle Jan. Listen, and I'll tell you something that will astonish you. But, for heaven's sake, keep cool and calm; for, if you were to be too much grieved and put out about it, I should never forgive myself."

"Well, then? well, then?"

"You know well enough, Uncle Jan, that Mother Ann has a son."

"Yes, to-be-sure,—little Bart [*Bartholomew*]; I know him well enough,—the thievish young rascal that used to come stealing our apples before the garden-wall was put to rights. If he doesn't end on the gallows, why, neither he nor it will get their due!"

"Yes, Uncle Jan, but that was a long while ago; before I was here. But now the child is a young man. He has other tricks now,—different enough, but not a hair's-breadth better. Every holiday, and many other times besides, when he might be doing something, he's off to the ale-house, drinking, dancing, singing, laughing, as who but he? Wherever 'Begone dull care' is

being sung by a dozen roisterers, depend upon it, he's one of them."

"Well, well, he's just going on as one might have expected from his beginning! But what says Mother Ann to all this?"

"Oh, she's just one of the same sort, and is as sweet upon her precious son as if his name already stood in the calendar! And now do you see why it is that they make so much of Cecilia up at the Chapel farm, always have something nice ready for her, and, in fact, do all they can to make her one of themselves, by turning her to their own dainty, flaunting, extravagant ways?"

"Why, pray?'

"Why, that the widow may get up a match between her lad and your Cecilia, to-be-sure! Do you see it now, Uncle Jan?

The old man shook his head with a thoughtful air, as though in doubt and unable well to see his way in the demonstration.

"I understand well enough," at last he said; "but what is there in this that need frighten me so terribly? I haven't to give Cecilia a portion when she's married!"

"My poor good Uncle Jan!" cried Thys, in a tone of compassion, "your just and generous heart cannot understand so much craft and selfishness! I will speak more clearly, then. Mother Ann is poor, and her son too. You are rich——"

"What's that you say?" interrupted the old man, in a tone of horror, such as might reasonably

have been called forth by some terrible blasphemy; "rich? I rich? Who has put such a wicked slander into your head?'

"Softly, Uncle Jan! I'm not speaking for myself. I know only too well what a hard shift we have to make both ends meet. What I'm talking of is Mother Ann's calculation; so now, for a moment, let me speak as the widow thinks, —all at random. She's poor, you're rich, and Cecilia is heir to the half of whatever you may leave. If then the widow can only get her snugly married to Master Bart, these spendthrifts will one day lay their hands upon a good share of your property. No wonder then that they don't mind running in debt for the present to draw the poor girl on; they are just sinking a capital on *post-obit* for some thousands per cent. at your death."

Old Jan's eyes opened wider and wider with each word Thys spoke, and he shook in every limb; while the latter regarded his companion's growing disturbance with inward satisfaction, and hastened to follow up the impression he had made.

"Look you, Uncle Jan; the swindling pack have quite made up their reckoning that you won't live much longer. And then, the moment the old miser—that's what they call you—is well under the turf—why, then, my service to you, a jolly life they'll have of it! A pretty guzzling there'll be then, and fine times for Bart in the

ale-houses! And so, with all sorts of extravagance and abomination, they'll squander the little that you've had so hard a struggle to scrape together. And then, alas! the worst of the whole is, that at the end of the game our poor Cecilia will find herself a beggar, and most likely will have nothing for it but to curse her folly to the end of her days. But let us hope that God's providence will order it better for her!"

A long and distressing fit of coughing for some time hindered the old man from coming to speech; and then unearthly were the sounds that broke from his laboring chest as they re-echoed in the vaulted chamber.

Thys had left his seat, and held a wooden bowl with water to the sufferer's lips with one hand, while with the other he gently patted him on the back. To see him, one would have said that he bore a true, a boundless affection to his aged friend: his voice was so gentle and compassionate, so caressingly did he attend the old man in his need. A loving son could not have had more anxious care for a beloved father.

At last the cough ceased, and poor old Jan could once more draw his breath freely.

Trembling still from the violence of the attack, he grasped Thys by the hand, and, in a tone of the uttermost despair, while a flood of tears rolled down his hollow cheeks,—

"Thanks! oh, thanks, my good friend!" he exclaimed; "you and you alone have compassion

on me. All the rest wish me dead. Cecilia, you that I have loved as my own and only child, you too are ungrateful! And then, oh misery, misery! the little bit of money that I've so hardly got together—saved upon the very bread out of my mouth—after my death they'll squander it in mere prodigality and riot! And, good heavens! I must die with that dreadful thought in my heart! Ah me! And so they dare to say that I'm rich, Thys?"

"They call you the rich miser."

"I dare say they think that I'm worth a matter of a hundred guilders?"*

"Fifty thousand, says the widow."

"Oh me! oh me!" cried the old man, beside himself, "that's the way that virtue and poverty are maligned! But Thys, my friend, you know better, don't you?—you that share my poverty and are my only support in all my afflictions?"

"They're a pack of liars and evil-speakers, Uncle Jan! Don't trouble your head about them as long as only we can save our poor Cecilia from the snares of these deceivers."

"Yes, our Cecilia—and my poor money!" sighed the old man. "Ah, Thys! if only I was younger I'd turn spendthrift; I'd get rid of every farthing I have in riotous living. But no; then I might in the end come to die of hunger."

A short pause of silence followed this pas-

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* 1 guilder = 20 stivers, *i. e.* 1*s.* 8*d.* English money.

sionate exclamation. The old man seemed as laboring under an access of fever, and was evidently tortured in his mind by the terrible prospect before him. At last Thys resumed, in a tone of consolation:—

"But be calm, and don't lose heart, Uncle Jan. They're not so far forward yet, the vile swindlers! I don't believe that at present Cecilia has the least idea of what they're about. The poor girl is just led astray. True enough, she's standing on the very brink of the pitfall; but be sure that with good-will and spirited determination she may yet easily be saved."

The miser looked up with hope in his eyes, and said, imploringly,—

"Ah, yes, my friend! for God's sake advise me what I had best do! I'm quite unable to think for myself; my mind is utterly paralyzed with vexation and grief."

"The matter's simple enough, Uncle Jan. You're afraid that Cecilia, either now or after your death, will marry a spendthrift, and so all her inheritance be squandered and she herself come to poverty and wretchedness. Well, then, make sure of her, by getting her, once for all, married to a prudent, careful, saving man, that will make her happy."

"Ah, yes!—a careful, saving man," repeated the old man, sinking into thought. "Yes, indeed!"

But, after a long consideration, he shook his head, and, in a discomfited tone, sighed out,—

"'Tis of no use; I've gone through the whole village in my mind, and there's not one of the sort to be found,—not one at least but what's as old as myself. All the rest give themselves up to luxury and extravagance."

"You can't say that of me, at all events," interposed Thys, half smiling.

The old man regarded him for a moment with a sort of timid astonishment, and then replied,—

"Ah! only to see how one's wits can go woolgathering! That you should be the only one that I've not thought of, and just the only one that's fit for her! But, Thys, you'd never take her; you don't love her."

Thys looked down with an air of embarrassment.

"I don't know about that," he replied, with a sigh; "but if I were rich I'd give all I had to see her happy."

"Then you must indeed love her dearly, Thys. But then too, alas! my dear friend, she's so sadly set against you,—quite without cause, I well know. One might really say that her dislike of you came of a diseased imagination."

"I know that she hates me," interrupted Thys; "I know well enough, too, that she will go on hating me; that I should be unhappy with her."

"And yet you would marry her?"

"I feel so strongly moved by compassion for her and gratitude to you that I would make the sacrifice. In her infatuation she hates and de-

spises me; well, in return I will save her, be her guardian angel for life; will care for her and spare for her, and see that the trifle she may one day have is kept together. And then perhaps—who can tell?—perhaps in the end she may reward me with a change of feeling toward me."

These words, uttered in a tone of high resolve and magnanimous self-sacrifice, made a deep impression on the old man's feelings. With much emotion, and grasping his companion's hand, he exclaimed,—

"Thanks, thanks, my generous friend! you are the only thoroughly upright man that I know. And so you would marry Cecilia, live on with her here in my house, and help me to reach the grave without falling into worse poverty than I am in now? And after my death you will take care that the few pence I have scraped together are not squandered? God bless you! I accept the sacrifice you offer, and recognise you as my best benefactor."

"You've made up your mind then, Uncle Jan?"

"Irrevocably, my good Thys."

"But should Cecilia refuse?"

At this question the old man only shrugged his shoulders and made no answer; he dared not fairly contemplate it.

"Always the same!" cried Thys, somewhat impatiently, in a tone between jest and annoyance.

"It is true, my good friend, the girl has downright bewitched me; give me a little time to per-

suade her. And do you, meanwhile, try and do something for yourself. Be friendly with her; talk to her a little; don't be so sharp with her about a bit of butter more or less; keep a good sod of peat against she comes home."

"What weakness, Uncle Jan!" interrupted the other, somewhat scornfully; "when once the ill seed has fairly taken root, it's not a bit of butter that will clear the ground of it."

"Well, well!" answered the old man, half put out, "if fair means won't do,—why, then, we must see."

And with these words he rose from his seat, and, coughing as he went, directed his way to one of the doors.

"I will go up-stairs for a while," he said; "I am tired. I shall see you again at dinner-time; don't put too much salt to the turnips."

"They're frozen, Uncle Jan."

"They'll be all the tenderer, Thys. And use the same pot again; the butter has quite soaked into it."

And with these words he disappeared, and immediately afterward his step was heard upon the stairs.

For a few moments Thys stood listening, till he had heard the sound of two or three doors as they were successively shut to and locked. Then suddenly his bearing entirely changed. The stoop disappeared from his shoulders, a scornful smile passed over his lips, his eyes rolled briskly under

their brows;—in fact, he had all the joyous air of a victor returning from the field of battle.

Stepping on tiptoe, he now approached a cupboard, took out a loaf of tolerably fine bread, cut a substantial slice, and buttered it half an inch thick. With glistening eyes and a smile of gluttonous delight he bit into it, and rapidly swallowed mouthful after mouthful with indescribable greediness. Then he shut up the cupboard, put every thing in its place again, and resumed his seat in the chimney-corner, having first well heaped up the fire with peat, which he now proceeded to blow into a blaze that it was a comfort to look upon. Then, having for some time rubbed his hands with an expression of intense satisfaction, he settled down into an attitude of repose, murmuring to himself, with a hateful smile upon his countenance,—

"Ha, ha! the good-for-nothing old skinflint! Why, he'd cut a farthing in four! Before he pays away a centime he turns it ten times round, as though it were a bit of his soul. He'll soon come to putting his old shoes in the pot, because once upon a time they've been greased. And then he's so poor!—oh, so poor!—as if I didn't know well enough why it is that he locks all the doors behind him so carefully when he goes upstairs. Now he lies routing about in the ten-guilder pieces, the miser! However, he'll have so much the more to leave behind him; and I'll take care that I get my share."

Then, after a moment's pause, he resumed, thinking aloud:—

"Strange it is that the old money-grubber should concern himself so about what's to become of his savings when he's gone! Why, he's in case to haunt the house afterward! To-be-sure, of all foolishness in the world that of a miser is the most foolish. To be fond of money just because it glitters! Why, one might as well be in love with so many bits of broken crockery! No! if gold is the world's god, 'tis not its glitter that makes it so. Money is the real devil in Doctor Faustus; whoever has it at his command—a wish, and, hey, presto! 'tis there! Ah! in that view I too love money, and still more than Uncle Jan does. But let the wretched old miser once be under ground, and if ever he comes back he'll see whether I'll go on cheating the dogs of their portion and feasting upon rye-bread sopped in warm water. It wouldn't cost one a great deal to turn this nursery of spiders into a right proper little manor-house; 'twould do very well new-painted inside and out and comfortably furnished; and then good clothes and a good kitchen, plenty of meat and a good tap of beer, and—who knows?—perhaps wine and game, if the old fellow cuts up well—perhaps a horse even, and a servant; and then I'm your honor, and have the rascally peasants hat in hand to me. But I'll live carefully for all that;—give nothing away, and there will be plenty for every thing.

Cecilia will get the half; she's the only one of her line. And I think I may manage to shove the rest on one side, and get the other half for myself, though I'm not of the family. Well, we'll see. When I accepted the old man's invitation to come and live with him at the Abbey farm, and made myself the slave of all his whims and caprices, I reckoned his life at some four or five years; now there are ten years gone by already, and I'm no longer a young man; half isn't enough to pay me now; I must have all. But Cecilia, — yes, there's the hitch. I must make friends with her, and then sound her about marriage. But how to go about it? Suppose I really loved her. I do believe I feel something of the sort for her. Come, come, Thys, no fooleries! they'll never answer; I'm hardly the sort of man to come round her on that tack. But there are other ways and means just as effectual, and perhaps more so."

Then he was silent a while, till suddenly his countenance darkened again, and, with his eyes fixed on the ground, he muttered,—

"But what if she's not to be moved? If every thing should run counter to my plans?"

A diabolical expression distorted his countenance; but he recovered himself almost on the instant, and added, in a lighter tone,—

"But why should one put oneself out before one knows that there's any need for it? Let me see first, and if it won't do that way, why, then,

I must try it on in some other. Meanwhile, I'll be off to the garden, to grub up Uncle Jan's turnips from the snow, and at the same time to con over some fine speeches against Cecilia comes home."

And he disappeared through the back door, chuckling as he went.

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE beyond the miser's dismal habitation, just upon the verge of the bare and open moor, stood a small farm-house, the clay-built walls of which sufficiently testified to the modest position of its occupants in the social scale. Nevertheless, poor as its appearance was, and monotonously as the universal white around it showed, yet all about the humble dwelling there reigned an air of life and movement, not to say of joyousness, which made the whole scene a fitting subject for a painter's ideal of a cheerful landscape.

Beside the drawing-machine of the well, which swayed its long arms up and down aloft in air, stood a peasant-girl busily engaged in drawing the water to wash turnips for the cattle. A right blooming complexion, rather perhaps to be likened to the peony than the rose, testified of vigorous health. She was not afraid to plunge her bare arms elbow-deep in the half-frozen water, and sang aloud at her work with a voice so clear and high, and a tone so lively, that one was irresistibly carried away into a dreaming anticipation of the yet far-off month of May.

Near the cottage-door stood a young peasant,

just as healthy-looking as the girl. In his large mild eyes was mirrored a mind at peace and a soul full of kindness; his whole countenance bore upon it the expression of a pleasant enthusiasm that seemed to look on life with a perpetual smile. There spoke out in his features and bearing so much of intelligence, so much at once of freedom and refinement, that from among a hundred peasant-lads of his age he must inevitably have been picked out as the most highly endowed, both morally and intellectually.

The young man was busily at work splitting up long hazel-staves, to be afterward made into hoops; and certainly he seemed to be losing no time about the job. So easy were all his movements that the staves seemed to fly through his fingers. Nor were his feet at rest either; he did not stand still a moment without shifting their position; one might almost have said he was dancing at his work. And, in fact, while his sister was warbling away at hers by the well, he whistled an accompaniment to her song, and unconsciously kept time to the measure with hand and foot. A black dog kept careering around him, diligently wagging his tail, and now jumping playfully at his hands, now vociferously barking, as though he too was minded to join in the concert.

On the cherry-tree hard by sat the friendly and familiar robin-redbreast; in the bushes not far off the hedge-sparrows twittered cheerily, while the

modest little wren fluttered hither and thither from branch to branch and from spray to spray.

Over all this the sun threw his streams of light; the snow on the cottage-roof sparkled like diamond-dust, gardens and fields showed as bathed in rose-colored and purple mist.

After a while, however, whether it was that her song was at an end, or because she now had to stoop more deeply over the bucket in which she was washing her turnips, the maiden's voice was heard no longer.

Immediately, as though he had all the while only been waiting for his turn, the lad flung his cap high into the air, caught it as it fell, and, with pleasing voice and manner, opened a merry country-ditty:—

"Away, away with grief and sorrow!
Away with trouble and with care!
Let's only think about to-morrow,
And all the fun that's in the fair.
Horns a-braying, fifes a-playing,
Drums a-beating, all so gay!
Down with care, and away with sorrow!
Here's to-day, and our fair's to-morrow."

"Bart! Bart!" cried the damsel, laughing, "you're in one of your wild fits again: you're enough to send one into fits with your madcap tricks!"

"That's right, dear Wantje [*Johanna*]," answered he; "keep me in order, or I shall soon begin playing I know not what pranks. The truth

is, I feel as happy—as happy as if I had more money than Cecilia's old uncle."

"Indeed! and why so, pray? What is there in the wind, then? I suppose you're going to the fair on Monday?"

"Well, I suppose I shall have to go to the fair; you know, Wanna, it's time we were looking out for a pig; but that's not what I'm so happy about. I've kept it secret all this while; but come, I'll tell you all about it now."

He went up to his sister, took her by the hand, and led her away behind an angle of the house, with such an air of mystery that she opened her eyes and looked at him all astonished.

"Well, what does it all mean? what's it all about?" at last she murmured out.

"Be quiet!" whispered Bart; and then, with his lips close to her ear,—

"Do you know what month of the year we're in, Wantje?" he asked.

"Let me see. Last week we were in the first month, I know. Well, I think by this time we must be in the short month; are we not?"

"Quite right, and to-morrow's the fourth of it. Now, Wantje, do you remember what saint's name stands in the calendar for that day?"

"How should I know that?"

"Why, it's St. Johanna!" cried Bart, with joyous exultation.

"St. Johanna? that's mother's fête-day!" replied

Wantje, her eyes inquisitively bent upon her brother's face.

"And now am I out of my wits, Wantje? Why, I do believe, if I hadn't reminded you, you'd clean have forgotten it."

"Well, but that's nothing to be in such a way about, Bart. To-be-sure, we shall have a merry day of it. We'll make a good cake, and have a can of good beer, and roast chestnuts, and tell stories, and ask riddles. Mind that you have something new, Bart."

"Yes, yes, Wantje; but all that isn't what I'm so merry about. Will you hold your tongue now, and say nothing about it to mother if I tell you all?"

"Not a single word, Bart."

"Well, then, listen. You know very well I've been making a pretty bit of money with this hoop-splitting; and this year, for the first time, we shall be able to put by a trifle after rent, rates, and taxes are paid. I've another whole load of hoops ready now, and—mother doesn't know this, mind—I'm to get a few cents a bundle more for them than I did before. To-morrow I shall go into town, deliver my hoops, get paid, and shall be able to keep back a trifle of money without mother's being a bit the wiser."

"Fie, Bart!" interrupted his sister, indignantly; "I shall just let mother know that without more ado, that I can tell you."

"Don't be up on your high horse so soon,

Wantje. Hear me out; and then, if you don't dance with joy yourself too, why, say I'm a liar, that's all. Haven't you noticed, Wanna, how sadly mother's best neckerchief is gone off, and how miserably shabby it makes her look? I'm downright ashamed when I see her going to church in it."

"That's very true, Bart; it has struck me so too before now."

This reply seemed much to delight the young man, and he proceeded, quite enthusiastically,—

"Well, then, Wanna, do you know what I've thought of? You don't? I mean to buy a fine large handsome neckerchief for mother; so handsome that Mistress Meulemans of the Manor farm sha'n't have a handsomer; all covered with flowers, red, yellow, and blue, that you may see it from here to the church."

The girl took her brother's hand in hers, and quietly, but with an emotion that came from the very heart,—

"Ah, that's well done of you, Bart!" she said; "how pleased mother will be!"

"Yes; but, Wanna dear," pursued the brother, in the joy of his heart, "that's not all. We must have some flowers; and I know three songs, four stories, and seven riddles, all spick-and-span new. I have learned them all on purpose, and kept them for mother's saint's-day. Ah, Wantje, Wantje! how we will laugh and sing and be merry! The tears come into my eyes when I think how mother

will stare when, right in the middle of winter, Cecilia comes up to her with a whole nosegay of beautiful fresh flowers and throws the fine new neckerchief over her shoulders."

"But, Bart, I look all about: where are you to get the flowers from? I think you've lost your senses."

Bart looked archly at his sister, and smiled kindly at her as he answered,—

"Wantje, do you know ever a lad of the name of Frank? A young fellow with fair hair and great eyes I mean, that's one of the under-gardeners at the manor-house?"

Poor Wantje turned red to the very roots of her hair, and looked at the ground in a state of great confusion.

"Come, come," said Bart, cheerily and kindly, "you needn't blush so about it, Wantje; he's as good a young fellow as there is, knows his business thoroughly, and is as merry and good-humored as the day is long. Well, now, don't you think, Wantje, that perhaps he'd get the flowers for me just because I'm your brother, eh?"

But at this very moment a voice from the house interrupted the conversation just in time to save the blushing maiden the embarrassment of a reply. It was that of their mother, calling to them:—

"Bart! Wanna! dinner!"

The latter lost no time in availing herself of the opportunity to escape, and made the best of her

way in, while Bart followed close after her, repeating, in an undertone,—

"Wantje, you may tell Cecilia, but not mother. Be sure you don't tell mother."

In-doors, meanwhile, the mother was busily occupied in ladling out the soup, or rather porridge, into a bowl of ample proportions. She was not alone, however; for beside the fire sat a young girl, whose dress, very similar to Wanna's upon the whole, had nevertheless in its make, and especially in its wearer's mode of carrying it, something about it which savored of town bringing-up. Nor were there wanting other points of discrimination, which showed at a glance that it was no country-girl who was bearing Bart's mother company: the lower tone of the complexion, the more delicate features, the less sturdy limbs, all told the same tale. Her eyes were soft, the expression of her countenance gentle and patient, with something of a pensive character about it that drew the beholder to her as by a charm;—something earnest and thoughtful, which testified at once of vigor of character and depth of feeling. She was at work with her needle on some article of female apparel.

The mistress of the house now turned to her guest, and said, in an affectionate tone of voice,—

"Come, Cecilia, dinner is on table."

At this moment in came Bart, singing his old refrain:—

"Down with care, and away with sorrow!
Here's to-day, and our fair's to-morrow."

No sooner, however, had Cecilia's sweet but earnest countenance met his eye, than he suddenly broke off his song and moderated the haste of his walk, as though impressed by her presence with a feeling of reverence.

All present now took their places at the table and said a silent grace, after which each, spoon in hand, was soon busily employed upon the well-tasting porridge with all the zest of a good honest appetite. That finished, a large dish of potatoes and a piece of bacon succeeded upon the table.

All the party seemed thoroughly happy; from each one's eyes beamed health, satisfaction, and thankfulness. Ever and anon Bart threw in his jest, pretended to burn himself with the hot potatoes, or made comical and unintelligible allusions to the morrow's festival; and thus the merry laugh went round all the time the meal lasted. Had some man of millions perchance seen this little company at their dinner, assuredly, with all his wealth, he would have envied the happiness of their simple lot.

But hardly had they begun upon the second and final dish, when a light and timid knock was heard at the door.

"That's the widow of the poor mason that died of a fall some months since," said the mother; "I saw her on Sunday at church, and told her she might call here every Tuesday for a trifle. Wanna, cut her a hunch of bread."

And then, turning toward the door, she cried, "Come in!"

The door opened, and showed a poor woman, still tolerably young, but with cheeks pale and hollow, and clothing so scant and thin that it made one shiver to look at her. Her countenance, worn and faded as it was, bore the impress of earnestness and intelligence; there was an expression of nobleness and energy on it which testified that thus employed the poor widow was not in her right place. She led by the hand a little girl, whose teeth chattered with the cold.

With downcast eyes, she went on with the paternoster which she had already commenced while standing at the door, but else not a word did she utter. Wanna handed her the piece of bread which she had cut, at the same time saying,—

"Poor Kate! I had never thought to see you come to this pass. You, so prudent and so industrious! It quite hurts me to see it."

"The winter is so long," sighed the widow; "I've not been able to get any work, Wanna; and now I'm just driven to it by hunger; but in the summer there will be work to be got, and then things will go better."

The poor child meanwhile gazed fixedly on the table with hungry eyes and watering mouth. Cecilia contemplated the scene with the deepest compassion. All at once, as though some sudden inspiration had flitted through her heart, she cast upon Bart a look of earnest and peculiar meaning;

and at the same instant, whether it was that he took the hint from her or followed a similar suggestion of his own thoughts, he went up to the poor widow, took her by the hand, and led her to the chair which he had just left.

"Sit down, dear Kate," he said, "and take some dinner with us. Where there's enough for four there's enough for six; and if the calculation turns out false, why, God will bring it right in the end."

While these few words were saying, Cecilia had set the little girl upon her own chair; additional seats were soon drawn to the table, and all the party made a hearty and cheerful meal from the good food before them. But, as soon as the poor widow had appeased the first cravings of her hunger, she kept turning her eyes with an ineffable expression of tenderness on the child, that with childlike happiness and unconcern was enjoying the good things before her; and soon silent tears began to trickle down the mother's cheeks. Every one present regarded her with astonished looks, which seemed to inquire of her the cause of this sudden emotion,—every one, that is, except Cecilia, who alone understood her feelings, and at once addressed herself to them.

"Is that your only child?" she asked.

"No indeed, miss," answered the widow. "I have two more; this here is the eldest. And the others—poor little lambs—are sitting at home without a fire; and for the last week they've had nothing to eat but a morsel of rye-bread."

"But what was it that brought the tears into your eyes so suddenly?" asked Wanna.

The poor woman bowed her head, and answered, without looking up,—

"A mother—but you won't quite understand it, Wanna. It makes me sad when I see my Mieken* eating there, and then think of the poor little things that are sitting hungry at home."

But, even while she was speaking, Bart rose from table, and, as he wiped his mouth,—

"I understand it well," he said.

Then, turning to his mother, he went on:—

"Mother, I'll work two hours more every day, and I'll give up my Sunday's beer-money, if you'll give poor Widow Kate and one of her children their dinner every day, as long as I can pay for it by my overwork and my saving."

The mother looked on her son for a while with sparkling eyes; then, in a low voice, and with a tear trembling on her eyelids,—

"Bart, my boy," she said, "I've always loved you dearly, but now I love you better than ever."

As for the poor widow, her emotion was intense. With a countenance beaming with gratitude, she grasped Bart's hand, and exclaimed, in a tone of solemn benediction,—

"God is just. You give to your neighbor not only the sweat of your brow, but the kindly feelings of your heart. You do for the poor widow

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* Diminutive of Mary.

all that you could do for a sister. God is just, and he will repay it you with happiness here upon earth."

And as she spoke she glanced at Cecilia, as though indicating to her young benefactor the source whence that happiness should flow.

Cecilia's eyes meanwhile had met Bart's with an expression of tender gratitude, which, along with the widow's words, had wellnigh turned his head. For a moment he looked proudly up, but almost in the same instant, as though anxious to throw off an emotion that was too much for him, with a hasty gesture and a light laugh he cried,—

"Hold, there! let me alone, or you'll send me clean out of my seven senses! What's that you're saying about happiness? As it is, I wouldn't change with any king on earth. Sit down by the fire a bit, Kate, and give yourself a good warm. Here, Wanna, bring us a bundle of brushwood, and let's have a blaze; get the bellows and blow till it crackles again."

Cecilia meanwhile had taken her seat by the fireplace, with the child on her lap. What it was that she was so quietly whispering to the happy little lamb none of the others could hear; but something sweetly pleasant it must surely have been that passed between them, for the little thing threw her arms round her kind patroness's neck and gave her a right hearty kiss. The poor widow contemplated the scene with a smile of heavenly satisfaction.

But presently Cecilia set the child down, went up to the mother, and said something to her in an undertone. She was evidently proposing to her that they should leave the house together. Wanna, who as well as all the rest noticed this, approached her brother, and softly whispered in his ear,—

"What can Cecilia want with poor Widow Kate? She can never be thinking of taking her to her uncle's?"

"Why, can't you see? She's going to give her something, to-be-sure."

"Ah, yes! the seven stivers she's just got from the landlady at the White Hart for making the children's clothes. But Cecilia gives away every penny she earns. Her uncle must know of it: I wonder what he says to it."

"Well, why should you trouble your head about it, Wanna? It's no business of ours."

"Well, Bart, I was only making the remark."

While this little discussion was going on aside, the widow had been offering her hearty thanks to Mother Ann; Cecilia now expressed hers to Bart in another sweet smile, and bade them all farewell until the afternoon; and then, taking little Mieken by the hand, left the cottage, closely followed by poor Kate.

For the distance of a hundred yards or more they walked on together in silence. At last they reached the end of the footpath which led up from the road to the cottage, and here Cecilia led her companion aside, under the cover of a hedge, and,

first looking carefully round on every side, to make sure that they were not observed, began, in a suppressed voice,—

"Your name is Kate Melsens, I think?"

"Yes, miss," was the answer. "My husband that's gone lived with your father in his young days."

"That I know, Kate. And has he never told you of what happened in our house when he was living with us?"

"Of a fire, miss? Oh yes! the fingers of his left hand were all stiff and crooked from it."

Cecilia stood for a while with her eyes steadfastly bent upon the ground; she seemed oppressed with a feeling of extreme sadness. Little Mieken looked up to her with an air of concern, and pulled vehemently at her hand, as though to rouse her up from her depression. The widow looked on in silence, and not without amazement.

Presently Cecilia took the poor woman by the hand.

"Do you know, Kate," she said, "that your husband at that time saved my life at great risk of his own? Yes, indeed; but for him, brave man, I should have been burned to ashes."

"But, miss, any one else would have done as much; that needn't affect you so grievously now."

"That's not what I was sad about, Kate. But I would so gladly stand your children's friend in their need, and, alas! alas! I have not the means."

"A kind heart is the best almsgiving."

"Listen to me, now, Kate; but mind, you mustn't say a word about it. Look you, here are seven stivers, and perhaps to-morrow, when you come to the Chapel farm with your other child, I shall be able to give you a trifle more; and I will make some clothes for your children out of some that I have of my poor mother's,—good warm things. And perhaps I may be able to find something that will do for you too. And if only God will bless my endeavors to do something for you, why, perhaps the worst of your distress may soon be at an end."

These few words deeply affected the poor widow, so that for very emotion she could not restrain her tears, which flowed abundantly, dropping in a hot shower upon Cecilia's hand, which she had seized and held in hers. At last she found words:—

"Ah, miss, I was so wretched! so wretched that I sometimes was wellnigh beside myself. Yes, indeed; so that I believe I should have long since died of it, only I felt that I must not; for what would have become of my poor lambs then? And now your kind heart and your friendly words, still more than the help you are giving me, lift me all at once quite out of my sorrows. Oh, how I will pray to God for you! On our knees will I and my children ask for blessings on you each day in our poor hovel."

"If I were but rich! if I were but rich!" repeated Cecilia, meanwhile, absently.

"Rich!" repeated poor Kate; "if you're not

now, you'll be one day, miss, as rich as a Jew."

"You are mistaken, Kate. People think so, I know; but that is all a mistake."

"But are you not your uncle's next heiress, then?"

"My good woman, my uncle is not rich. All that he has is the poor old house we live in, and a very trifling income besides."

"No, no, miss; that is not so. He has a great hoard of money somewhere besides. My husband, you know, was a mason, and once, a good while ago, he did a long job of work for your uncle at the Abbey farm, all in secret. I know all about it; and I dare say there's not another living soul besides himself knows so much about his affairs as I do."

Cecilia could neither speak nor stir for utter astonishment.

"And I don't say it out of pride, miss," proceeded the widow, "but I may call you cousin, too; for your uncle's late wife was my husband's mother's sister. So it goes in the world:—one up and another down; families scattered hither and thither to get their bread, till in the end folks no longer know their own relations."

"And so dear little Mieken, too, is a cousin of mine?" inquired Cecilia, with real pleasure, kindly stroking the child's head the while.

"Well, she is; though far enough off, very far, indeed," replied the widow. "Still, if every thing

went fairly in the world, I should have my share in the inheritance; but that hypocritical cheat, Thys, will take good care that none of our side of the family gets any thing.

"Nevertheless, my uncle is a just man," said Cecilia. "His way of life is a strange one, but he has a good heart for all that."

"I know that, miss; but do you know Thys?"

To this question Cecilia could only reply by a look at once of wonder and interrogation.

"I know him," proceeded Kate. "He long lived in the village where I was born. Thys is a man that in his young days ruined his parents with his extravagance and in the end broke his father's heart. Afterward, when he came to want, as he'd had a pretty good education, he got his living as a kind of agent in all sorts of odd jobs, and black jobs too, for the matter of that; and so, to set some crooked matter or another straight, he got his foot in at the Abbey farm. He soon saw that there was a fine field for him and his tricks there. Spendthrift and glutton as he is, he shammed the miser and careful housekeeper. Do you know why, miss? To rob me,—me and so many other poor folks of our side of the family,—to rob us, I say, of our share of the inheritance. And perhaps even—but no, it can't come to that either; your uncle is too fond of you."

Cecilia stood with her head bowed down and her eyes fixed on the ground. She had forgotten herself and all about her in her astonishment at

the singular revelations of the widow, who now went on:—

"But fear nothing, miss; we sometimes have our wits more about us for others than for ourselves. Thys may yet find that poor Kate may perhaps trip him up one of these days, clever as he is. Besides, miss, you're the only one of your side of the family, and the direct heir, as your father was own brother to your uncle Jan. Well, we'll talk over this matter again; for the present I just wished to put you on your guard against the hypocrite; but you've been standing too long here in the cold, all out of kindness to a poor widow. Now I'll go home to my little ones to gladden their hearts with the good news, and to pray for you, miss."

Cecilia roused herself from her reverie, and seized her new friend by the hand.

"Dear Cousin Kate," she said, "will you do something for me? But mind, you must not forget to do it really."

"That I will, and gladly, miss!'

"Well, then, say the prayers not for me, but for my uncle. You'll be sure and not forget it?"

"I will surely do it."

"Good-by till to-morrow, then."

And with an outpouring of the most fervent thanks the widow took her way toward her poor home, ever and anon casting a look back upon Cecilia, who on her side also was now hastening

homeward. With emotion the poor mother said to her child, as they went,—

"Mieken, last night you dreamed of an angel, did you not? Well, that is the angel! and that villain Thys, at the Abbey farm, he is the devil! Come, Mieken dear, let's make haste, child."

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVED at her home, Cecilia opened the door and entered. In the ground-floor room she found no one. The cold solitude of the place made a deep impression upon her feelings, notwithstanding her being so well accustomed to it. Slowly her eye wandered round the chamber, and fell half-unconsciously upon the gray cobwebs that tapestried the walls. A deep expression of sorrow and compassion hung upon her countenance, and for a while she stood, lost in thought, in the middle of the room. Assuredly her mind was occupied in a comparison between the heavenly tone of cheerfulness, contentment, and love, which reigned in the modest cottage she had just left, and the chill solitude of the apartment in which she now found herself. Soon, however, she took a seat by the fireplace in the chimney-corner, and contemplated the ashes with vagrant eye. A few words which escaped from her lips in her reverie showed that it was the recent disclosures made by Widow Kate that were busying her mind.

Hardly had she been seated there for a few moments, when a man's head showed itself behind

her, projecting through the half-open door of a small side-chamber. As soon as this new-comer espied the maiden, a singular expression shot over his countenance; his gray eyes glistened with satisfaction under the bushy eyebrows, telling plainly enough of evil cunning, while the great mouth, drawn backward into a stupid grin, betrayed a hideous combination of greediness and triumph.

Instantly the man disappeared, but immediately afterward returned, and passed into the large room, with three lumps of peat in his hand and a bundle of brushwood under his arm. He came forward with as pleasant a smile upon his countenance and as much of simple good-heartedness in it as his repulsive features admitted of his assuming.

"Good-day, Cecilia!" he began, in a kind tone of voice. "It is cold, is it not? Come, take your feet out of the ashes, and I'll make up a warm little fire for us."

The maiden looked at Thys—for he it was—all in amaze. Never before had she heard these tones in his voice, never before beheld that honest smile upon his face. She was totally at a loss what to make of the change, and, with the widow's warning words just fresh in her memory, was still more perplexed than she would otherwise have been. With rapid movements, meanwhile, Thys laid the peat upon the hearth, and purposely so arranged the fuel that

by far the greater part of it should be piled up toward the side on which Cecilia sat.

"What are you about, Thys?" she exclaimed; "you are laying the wood quite outside the hearth."

"That's that you may get a good warm, Cecilia," was his reply, while with the blow-pipe he wrought the wood into a flame which it joyed the heart to see.

"Look there!" he went on; "that's the way. It's not for myself, Cecilia, but for you; but if it gives you pleasure, why, so it does me too, even though I should have no good of it myself."

"But—but, Thys," she cried, in astonishment, "I don't understand you; or is it just for a joke? You're quite a different man, all of a sudden."

"Ah, Cecilia," sighed Thys, in a melancholy tone, while he fixed his eyes imploringly on hers, "you don't know me! you hate me!"

"Hate you! fie, that's an ugly word! I'm afraid of you, Thys, that's true; you're always so sour, and speak so roughly to me. You know very well, Thys, that I desire nothing so much as to be kind and friendly with everybody; that's my temper.'

"You'll not believe me, Cecilia, but that's just my way too, and always has been."

"Your way?" cried the maiden, incredulously.

"Ah, Cecilia!" he again sighed out, "it grieves me to see myself so misunderstood by you that

I am forced, much against my will, to lay all my heart open to you. I am sincerely attached to poor old Uncle Jan; and latterly my only end and aim in life has been to make my benefactor's last days easy and peaceful and as much as possible to spare him all annoyance. You women are always so simple, and can never understand one's doing in a small matter what isn't well perhaps in itself, in order to gain some great good. However, that's what I've been doing. Uncle Jan is sadly avaricious. His whole soul is in his money. I don't mean to blame him, Cecilia; it's a weakness of old age. Well, to contradict and thwart him in that respect would only embitter his life and shorten his days. What have I done, then? Why, out of love to him I've played the miser myself,—have pinched and lived hard, gone cold and hungry, and sat day after day in this solitary den, that's more like a grave than any thing else. Yes indeed, Cecilia, many a poor creature I've hunted away from the door while my heart was bleeding for them all the while. I have longed for society and friends, and I have let the best years of my life go by in this deathlike solitude. I have loved you as the very image of simple, unaffected goodness; my soul has thirsted after your sisterly affection; and yet I have been bitter and harsh with you,—rough and rude sometimes, I know it well enough. And why have I done all this? It was —try and understand me, Cecilia—it was all to

please Uncle Jan, and that I might be a comfort to him in his old age."

Cecilia seemed quite overcome by his words and manner, though still unable to say a word for sheer astonishment.

"Oh, how I have suffered!" he continued, in a tone of desperation. "Always feigning, never oneself, cried out upon for one's self-sacrifice, and obliged to put up with all in silence: it is as though one had neither heart nor soul."

He covered his eyes with his hands; all the while, however, closely spying between his fingers at the expression of Cecilia's countenance, which ever more and more spoke out her astonishment.

"Poor Thys!" at last she replied, in a tone of commiseration; "why didn't you tell me all this sooner? Then I should never have felt so unjustly toward you."

"And now—now that you know it, Cecilia," he pursued, taking away his hand from before his face, and throwing into it the most imploring expression of which it was capable, "will you still hate me now?"

"I have never hated you, Thys," answered Cecilia; "if I had, how should I be pleased at the friendliness you now show? I would gladly, I am sure, regard you as a brother, and henceforth I will always treat you like one."

"You won't be afraid of me any more, then?"

"Why should I, if you are good-hearted and kind?"

A pause in the conversation ensued. It was evident, from the unsettled wandering of his eyes, that Thys was anxiously debating something in his mind. At last he raised his head, and said, with an air of indifference,—

"Cecilia, I have something to tell you that will perhaps astonish you. But don't let it trouble you; it's only a project, and may never come to any thing."

"Oh, well, then, I'll try and not be frightened about that," answered Cecilia, with a smile; "so let me hear it, Thys!"

"Uncle Jan wants you and me to be married together."

"How? What's that you say?" cried the maiden, in an agony of affright.

"I for my part have told him it couldn't be," he pursued.

"Good heavens! what an idea!" ejaculated Cecilia, still quite beside herself.

"I told him it couldn't be," repeated Thys, his eyes intently fixed upon his intended prey.

"And he gave up the thought; didn't he, Thys?" she rejoined, in an imploring tone.

"No indeed! For all I can do to talk him out of it, he obstinately holds fast to it, and won't let it go."

"Oh me! oh me!" sobbed the poor girl, with her apron at her eyes, and vainly endeavoring to

conceal her tears, while Thys looked on with a fiendish smile, till, suddenly rising from her seat,—

"Where is my uncle?" she exclaimed.

"You know well enough," was the answer, "that he is up-stairs; and if you call him down or disturb him he'll be out of humor for the whole day."

Cecilia sat down again; then, in a tone of mingled despair and supplication, she resumed,—

"Oh, Thys, dear Thys! do but get this thought out of his head!"

"Let us talk the matter over coolly, Cecilia. Perhaps we shall find some way that may satisfy us all."

"Ah yes!" sighed the maiden. "Help me, Thys! I will be grateful to you my life long."

"Look you now, Cecilia; before you go to give yourself up to grief and sorrow and to accuse our good Uncle Jan of caprice and tyranny, it is necessary you should know something of his reasons; and perhaps then you'll find that you have reason to be grateful to him, after all. Uncle Jan thinks that he hasn't much longer to live, and for my part I believe that he's right. Well, his greatest trouble is the fear of having to leave you behind alone and unprotected in the world; and nothing but seeing you once for all married will set him at ease on this point."

"But, Thys, I don't wish to marry,—at all events, at present; I am much too young yet."

"So I said to him; and that was one of the reasons for which I refused when first he spoke of it."

"Oh, heavens! you've never changed your mind, then? Don't say so!" she cried, in terror.

"Well, I don't quite know how to answer that myself," was the reply, "since that a doubt has risen in my mind as to what my duty really is; —what it is, in fact, that in generosity and right reason I ought to do. First, you must consider, Cecilia, that your uncle has now been nursing this project in his mind for months past, till it has thoroughly taken root among his thoughts. You know him: if he can't carry it out he'll surely fall ill with vexation, and very likely die; and then, Cecilia, we should be the cause of his death."

"Oh God! oh God!" cried the poor girl, raising her eyes to heaven.

"Would you wish to be the cause of his death, Cecilia?" pursued Thys, inexorably.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, covering her face with her hands and again bursting into tears.

"Then you would be willing to marry me, not to shorten his life?"

"But, Thys, you have always refused," she still objected.

"I have indeed refused," he replied; "but, when Uncle Jan in an agony of despair actually went on his knees to implore of me to complete all I had done for him by this one last and great-

est obligation,—when he told me that he should die of vexation and disappointment if I persisted in refusing,—then I could not help giving ear to my compassion and affection for him."

"What! did you consent, then, after all?"

"I can't be the death of him! And you, Cecilia?"

"Neither will I!" cried the maiden, in a voice broken by sobs. "But I will get this cruel thought out of his head. He will never be able to resist my prayers, my tears."

"Don't hope that, Cecilia. When have you ever known him give up any thing he had once set his mind on? Well, now, if he presses this upon you? if he tells you himself that your refusal will be the death of him?"

"Ah me! I should obey him," she sighed out, her tears flowing copiously all the while. And she bowed her head, and went on sobbing and weeping, with her apron at her eyes.

A gleam of satisfaction passed across Thys's countenance. He had reckoned on a more energetic resistance, and regarded the chief difficulty as now overcome. What had at first seemed impossible, even to himself, was now become possible. Even Cecilia's tears, so little flattering to himself or of good omen for his projects, failed to disturb him in his triumph. Nay, so elated was he with victory that he actually laid aside his hypocrisy, and proceeded to exhibit himself in his own true character. Perhaps he

thought it needless any longer to wear the mask; perhaps he thought to follow up his success, and assure his conquest by presenting to Cecilia's mind motives such as might in his view secure her willing acquiescence. Although, therefore, she never once looked up at him, he went on to open his heart to her in a tone of positive enthusiasm:—

"You are quite wrong in being so sad about it, Cecilia. I'll venture to say we shall be as happy a pair of mortals as can be found. You will have handsome clothes, live in a fine house, ride in your carriage, sit in the chancel at church, and, in fact, live and be treated in every way like a lady of rank. We will keep a capital table, with every thing of the best, have plenty of servants, and nothing to think of but good eating and drinking. You don't believe me, my good Cecilia? why, old Uncle Jan is as rich as a Jew! With grubbing and scraping, and heaven knows how, he has got together thousands upon thousands of guilders. That's why he bolts and bars all the doors so close when he is up-stairs; he goes up there to gloat over his money-bags."

Here he noticed a strange shudder running through his listener's whole body.

"I see by your movements, Cecilia, what you would say," he proceeded; "you would reproach me for encouraging him in his avarice. But don't you understand, then, that all the while

I'm saving for myself and you? The more he scrapes and stints the more there will be for you and me. Perhaps you may say that I am not one of the family, and so it is no affair of mine how much he leaves. So it may seem; but that's not the way it is, for all that. Uncle Jan has left me the half of all he has, and the other half you will get, as a matter of course. Just see, Cecilia; then you and I will have all that the old man leaves to our two selves! Fine times for us then; we shall be Your honor and My lady, and need deny ourselves nothing!"

Doubtless he took the maiden's silence for consent; for the tone of his voice grew more and more jeeringly triumphant as he went on:—

"And we sha'n't have much longer to wait, Cecilia. You may hear yourself how every day the old man croaks and groans more and more; his lungs are quite gone. And we'll get a will out of him that shall leave every thing to us two. Then all will go smooth and straightforward. And thus, when he's dead — we can't help that, you know,— the Lord be gracious to his soul!—why, then we shall have all the money; and we'll let the world see whether we know how to live or not."

Again, and still more violently, the maiden shuddered at his words of mockery. He was silent for a while, and seemed to be expecting an answer from her. As, however, she did not

speak, and still retained the same attitude, he at last began again,—

"Well, Cecilia, are you still crying?"

She rose slowly from her seat, took two or three steps backward, threw her head into an attitude of proud defiance, and cast upon Thys a look of such intense contempt that he sprang to his feet all in astonishment. Nevertheless, he still felt uncertain how to interpret her look and gesture, for the expression of her countenance showed rather a sort of satisfaction than any thing of sorrow.

"Well, well, what say you?" he asked at last, with anxious impatience.

"False villain!" cried the maiden, with an accent of the extremest contempt.

"How? What do you mean?" replied Thys, in great astonishment.

"I be your wife," she went on, with an air of spirit and dignity, "and help you in turning my poor old uncle to scorn even after his death, and in robbing widows and orphans of their share of his inheritance? Had I no choice but between that and being buried alive on the very brink of the grave, I would still say, 'No!'"

Thys looked upon the maiden in speechless consternation, who on her part so proudly confronted him that his eyes fell, unable to sustain her indignant glance.

"You thought that I was crying under my apron all the while," she went on. "But that

was not so. I saw your heart open, and I was heartily thanking God that he had turned it to open itself to me. Now I know you."

Yet a moment longer lasted the deceiver's confusion and silence. Once satisfied, however, that what he had just heard was Cecilia's real mind and final resolve, he speedily recovered himself; a malignant smile distorted his countenance.

"Ho, ho! that is the way you take it!" he said. "We'll soon see how that will end; I'll find the way to make you hear reason: trust me for that! You know me, say you? you're mistaken there! you don't half know me yet! There's more in me by a great deal than you think for. You shall come and ask pardon of me on your knees before I've done with you."

"That day you will never see, Thys!" she calmly replied.

"Never? You make me laugh. Isn't all you'll ever have in my hands, so to say? I can strip you of every penny of it."

"Take it!" she answered.

"Your uncle shall turn you out of doors!"

"So be it!"

"He shall curse you on his death-bed!"

This terrible threat broke the maiden's courage. Silent and depressed, she bowed her head.

"Ha, ha! your courage begins to fail you, does it? Where's your pride and obstinacy now?" pursued Thys, jeeringly. "But I'll touch you in a still tenderer place. D'ye think I don't know

why it is you're so set against me? There's a lad that you'd marry without so many tears about it, I take it; eh? There's the son of the widow at the Chapel farm,—a fine harum-scarum fellow he is, and a capital customer at the ale-house:—he's the one you'd like to have, isn't he? Very well, you shall have him. Yes, you shall have him, and then you may go begging together. I know you; you'll go through a great deal and bear a great deal to have your own way against me. I know that well enough; I know that that meek-looking phiz of yours has a stiff neck under it. But I'll not take my revenge on you alone. I'll find means to make the cause of your obstinacy feel it too. I'll hunt down Bart and his mother; they shall know what my hatred is and what it can do: I'll bring them to poverty, and not let them go till I see them lying upon straw. And whose fault will that be, then? Yours—only yours!"

These cruel menaces had quite crushed Cecilia. She leaned her head against the chimney-piece, and seemed immersed in unfathomable wo, while Thys's countenance beamed with savage joy. Something there was in his eyes at once so mean and so malignant that one might have deemed to behold in him a serpent which has fascinated its prey with its poisoned look and takes pleasure in making it suffer all the agonies of a thousand deaths before seizing and swallowing it.

"Within a quarter of an hour Uncle Jan will come down," he went on; "so, for the last time I warn you, think it well over before it is too late, whether you will have war or peace with me;—whether you will be rich and happy, or go out to service, and, likely enough, come to beggary. A quarter of an hour is soon gone."

Cecilia raised her head, and answered, weeping as she spoke,—

"I shall have my say too, and will tell my uncle all. He shall know your falsehood. He has a good heart, and will be amazed and terrified at so much wickedness."

"As you please," interrupted Thys, with a sarcastic smile. "Tell him of all my falsehood, as you're pleased to call it; repeat word for word all I've said to you; he'll not believe a syllable of it. He has a good heart, you say. Just so; and for that reason I'll make him do whatever I please. Accuse me as much as you will; the more the better."

In uttering these last words, Thys had gradually sunk his voice, so that Cecilia, who had again leaned her head against the chimney-piece, had but half heard the latter part of what he said. And in the mean while the hypocrite had stealthily and on tiptoe approached a side door, through which he now left the room, carefully and noiselessly making it fast behind him on the other side. A moment afterward Cecilia heard his voice in the inner part of the house, calling,—

"Uncle Jan! Uncle Jan!"

She sprang to her feet in consternation.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, as, with terror on her countenance, she looked round the room; "he's gone to my uncle, to be beforehand with me and tell his story first!"

In an agony she ran to the side door and essayed to open it. A cry of despair broke from her as she found by its resistance that Thys had shot the bolt on the other side.

"Alas!" she exclaimed; "he will never believe me! my only hope is gone! What am I to do? O God, take pity on me!"

She fell back upon a seat; her eyes wandered vacantly; she was in a very trance of distress and affright. From time to time she trembled violently as overhead she heard the flooring of the chamber above creak under the footsteps of Thys and her uncle. She was not left long in her anxiety, however; the door soon opened, and the two entered the room together.

The aspect of the old man's countenance was sad and severe; that of Thys, on the other hand, had assumed a hypocritical expression of simplicity. Slowly and with an air of indifference the latter walked up to the fireplace and took his seat beside the hearth. Her uncle also drew a chair for himself, took up his position not far from his weeping niece, and, in a tone of deep vexation and annoyance, addressed himself at once to her:—

"Oh, Cecilia, I never could have believed that you would be so ungrateful; and I can't believe it even now! What I desire to do is all for your good. It is purely out of love for you that I have had the thought and desire of marrying you to a man whose carefulness and good husbandry would be an assurance to me against your coming to poverty after my death. And you refuse?"

She sobbed more violently than ever, and made no answer. In a gentler tone, he went on:—

"Come, Cecilia, my child, the mischief's not done yet. I know that you will consent, after all, to please your poor old sick uncle; won't you? And all that you said to Thys was mere idle words; wasn't it?—words spoken in haste, and not from your heart? Come now, Cecilia, give your consent, I beg of you. Say you'll have our good Thys here; I'm sure he will make you happy."

She stood up, pale with anxious fear. A nervous twitching distorted her cheeks. As though beside herself, she cried,—

"Have him?—him?—that serpent?"

"Oh heavens! what have I done to her?" sadly and sorrowfully sighed out Thys. "You must see, Uncle Jan, that there's nothing to be done for it. Do pray leave her alone; I wouldn't for the world be the cause of trouble to her."

"False hypocrite!" murmured the maiden, with a glance of deepest scorn at her persecutor.

The old man meanwhile looked from the one to the other of his two companions with astonished eyes, as though surprised by some wholly unexpected phenomonen. And in fact the maiden, whom hitherto he had only known as a very lamb for patient endurance, stood then before him with flashing eyes and a tone of determined resolution in her voice;—a tone which spoke out the vehement disgust of her indignant spirit at the sneaking and dastardly wickedness of her enemy, but which made a far from favorable impression on her uncle's mind. He was silent; but two tears trickled down his cheeks.

"Alas! alas! there is nothing but deceit and false seeming in the world!" he said; "so it is with every thing,—with Cecilia's heart too. Child! child! so you've only been dissembling all these many years? Ah me! this will shorten my life."

This cruel reproach quite broke the poor girl's spirit. She threw herself upon her knees before her uncle, and, bedewing his hands with tears, exclaimed,—

"Oh, my dear uncle, you whom I love and respect as a second father, do not believe him; he is a very devil for falsehood! He has no regard for you; it is all a sham and hypocrisy, while in his heart—ay, and sometimes in his words too—he gibes at you and makes mock of you. Your money is all he wants, and he wishes you dead. It is but a few moments since he was speaking

of you in a way that frightened me. For God's sake, believe him not; he is your worst enemy!"

The old man's amazement waxed more and more; but it was quite at cross-purposes that Cecilia's words affected him. He raised her from the ground, but at the same time with his hand motioned her from him. Then, sorrowfully shaking his head, he looked inquiringly at Thys.

"Don't be too much vexed with her, Uncle Jan," responded the hypocrite. "You were young once yourself, and perhaps have been in love yourself too. At all events, you know well enough how interested people often turn such foolishness to account and lead a young heart astray by exciting its passions. But let's say no more about it at present; poor Cecilia is misled, and deserves rather pity than anger."

This insult and her uncle's injustice once more roused Cecilia out of her depression.

"Oh, it is too much!" she indignantly exclaimed. "Pity from you! I will have none of it; it's a mockery and an insult. What! weren't you within these few moments triumphing in the expectation that Uncle Jan could not live much longer?"

"What I said," replied Thys, "was to beg of you not to shorten the few years that he might yet have to live by setting yourself against his wishes."

"Falsehood! falsehood!" cried the maiden. "Didn't you jeer and sneer at my uncle?—at the old miser, as you called him? Didn't you seek to draw me into an abominable plot with you to get

all my uncle's property for ourselves, and after his death to squander it in luxury and extravagance? And didn't you, to tempt me, tell me that he had thousands upon thousands of guilders hoarded up?"

"How? What villanous calumnies are those? It is surely the devil that puts such thoughts into your mind, wretched child!" here broke in her uncle, at the same time clasping his hands over his head in a kind of desperation. "I have nothing!—nothing whatever!"

"Why will you thus distort my words, Cecilia?" added Thys, in a plaintive tone. "It is useless to heap sins upon your soul in this way; Uncle Jan will never believe you. I told you that the widow at the Chapel farm has got it into her head that it is so. It's too bad to put off other people's evil thoughts upon me."

The old man began to cough,—the usual sign of weariness with him; at the same time his dim eyes fired up with irritation, and it was evident from his countenance that he was upon the point of pronouncing some extreme and hasty determination; but Thys, stretching forth his hands in a supplicatory attitude, and as though to check him, interposed.

"Come, Uncle Jan," he said, "let things take their course, and don't put yourself out about them. Cecilia seems determined that you sha'n't have your will in this matter. Very well; let her take her own way, then, and marry Bart; it is she that will suffer the most by it, after all."

"Hold your tongue!" cried the old man, angrily; "what! are you, too, going to take their part now? Cecilia, if you have neither sense nor reason I must think for you and put my experience in the place of your weakness and folly. Now listen to me. I ask you for the last time, will you marry Thys or not? Tears are no answer. Speak! you have a tongue in your head!"

"Ah, dear uncle," the maiden sighed out with uplifted hands; "ah! do you know what you're doing?"

"Answer me: will you have Thys?"

"If I was taken to church with him by force," she replied, with all her energy, "I'd hold my breath and stifle myself before I got there."

"Fie, fie! what sinful words are those?" cried her uncle, astonished at her vehemence. "What is there in Thys to set you so against him, more than any other man?'

"A man! He a man?" she retorted, with delirious energy; "he is the very devil himself! the devil of falsehood and rapacity!"

"Cecilia, unhappy girl!" sighed Thys, "I forgive you! May God forgive you those wicked words as I do!"

"Well, then," pursued her uncle, "you will not have him?"

"Never!" was her firm reply. "I will go through any thing rather; I would die the cruellest death; be pointed at with scorn by all the world. No, never, never!"

The old man rose from his seat, and, in a tone of fixed resolve,—

"So be it!" he said; "you shall be treated as your ingratitude deserves. This afternoon you shall go to the Chapel farm and fetch away whatever you have there that belongs to you. You may stay there just five minutes, and if from that time forth you ever again speak to any of those bad people, even if you meet them by accident, or make any sign to them, or even look at them, then——"

A renewed fit of coughing here interrupted the old man and broke off his words; evidently what he was about to say pained him: he seemed glad of an excuse for delaying its utterance. Thys meanwhile cast a look of jeering triumph at the poor girl, who had again fallen back upon her chair and was now weeping bitterly. Again the old man essayed to speak as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"Then I will—ah me! I cannot get it over my lips! Child! child! if you did but know the suffering you're causing me!"

The plaintive tone in which these last words were spoken touched Cecilia to the very heart. She rose from her seat, threw herself upon her knees before the old man's feet, and seized his hand, which she kissed again and again, while she exclaimed,—

"Oh, uncle, I do indeed love you! love you as dearly as ever; gladly would I give all the days I

have yet to live to lengthen out yours, if God would grant my prayer! Ah, have pity, have compassion on me; and if I have ever said or done any thing to grieve or trouble you, then give me your forgiveness, for God's sake."

A smile of gladness lighted up the old man's countenance. Probably he was deceiving himself as to the intention of the maiden's words and gesture, for in a gentler voice he said,—

"For every fault there is forgiveness, Cecilia. I knew well that your heart could never have been so changed all in a moment. Let us forget all this, my child; the wisest of us goes astray sometimes. Ah, God be thanked that I now have my own good Cecilia back again!"

With these words he raised her from the ground, making at the same time a movement as though to bestow on her the kiss of reconciliation; but the look of anxious inquiry with which she met his eye threw him back into doubts and fears. Hesitatingly he added,—

"Well, I thought you had consented!"

Trembling spasmodically in every limb, she threw back her head, lifted her hands on high, and hastily ran off into the inner chamber, crying, as she went,—

"He is under a spell! God has forsaken me!"

Thys meanwhile had left his seat; he now drew near to the old man and took him by the arm.

"Come along, Uncle Jan," he said, "you'll only make yourself ill. There's nothing to be done for

it at present. Wait a little, and let Cecilia think over it when she's calmer; after all, perhaps, things will turn out better than we think."

And with these words he led him off, coughing violently as he went, into another room, and closed the door behind them. As for Cecilia, she stood motionless, with her head leaning against the wall; motionless but for the heaving of her bosom, shaken by bitter sobs.

CHAPTER IV.

The next afternoon the sun stood no less fair in the heavens, only already deeply declining toward the west, and therefore with diminished power in his beams. The snow, deprived of his enlivening fire, lay dull and monotonous; already had the birds that bear the winter best sought shelter from the approaching cold of night; a grim stillness reigned over the sleeping face of nature.

And at the Chapel farm, too, not a sound was to be heard—neither of human voices nor of human labor. Had it not been for the occasional lowing of the cow from within her stable, one might have deemed that no living being inhabited the place.

Within the house Wanna sat at her spinning-wheel beside the hearth, on which a great kettle of food was cooking for the cow. Assuredly some all-engrossing thought occupied her mind, for again and again the thread broke between her fingers, and often she would set her foot beside the treadle and work away energetically, the wheel all the while standing still. Her eye was fixed upon the face of the clock; she seemed to count each tick of the pendulum, and ever and anon cast a look of reproach upon the lazy hands, as though it

was their fault that the time did not pass more briskly.

Suddenly she was startled from her reverie by the great kettle boiling over, with an effusion of water which had wellnigh extinguished the fire.

"Why, Wanna, what are you about?" cried Mother Ann, who at the sound came running up out of the stable. "You'll soon let the water boil over upon yourself without feeling it. Why, girl! why, girl! since the last fair you've turned so dreamy that I don't know what to make of you!"

Wanna cast down her eyes in much embarrassment, and, evading direct reply, hastily answered,—

"Come, mother, come; let's be quick and take the kettle into the stable, and then I'll run down to the village for the green thread that Cecilia asked me to get for her; I shall be back directly."

"If Cecilia asked you, go: but do make haste, child; it's getting quite late."

While these few words were passing, mother and daughter together had carried the kettle into the stable. Soon Wanna returned alone. Her first look was at the clock; instantly, with brightened countenance and a suppressed cry of joy, she darted to the door, and was soon at some distance from the cottage. Now at last, after having once or twice looked back to assure herself of being out of sight and hearing, she ventured to vent her feelings in a merry laugh.

"Ha, ha!" she cried; "how mother will stare!

She'll know then how it was I let the kettle boil over."

And again she started off in a run, bounding along so that the snow flew up from under her feet. She had not yet reached the village, when from behind a plantation of fir she heard the brisk neighing of a horse.

"Ha! there they are!" she cried, exultingly. "Our Bles is pleased to get home again. If she knew what she's bringing with her, I believe, poor beast, she'd be off in a gallop."

It was not long before her brother and his cart turned the corner of the plantation and made their appearance in the road; and immediately off Wanna set again, running at a still greater rate than before, calling at the same time at the top of her voice, though still far out of hearing,—

"Bart, Bart, have you got it? Have you got the neckerchief?"

But though Bart could not hear, he certainly understood, for he stood erect in the cart and threw up his cap high in air,—not very dexterously, however, for it fell on the road instead of in the vehicle, which obliged him to pull up and get out to recover it. Before he had remounted, his sister came up to him, hot with haste.

"Well, Bart, have you got the neckerchief?" was still her cry.

"Wantje, Wantje," he answered, with a burst of gladness, "there's nothing like my luck! Only just think!—the gentleman—he's a sugar-baker—

that takes my hoops of me, asked me what made me look so happy when he paid me."

"Yes; but, Bart," interrupted his sister, with a gesture of impatience, "have you got the neckerchief?"

"To-be-sure I've got the neckerchief. But just listen," he continued; "I told this gentleman how it was mother's fête-day, and about the present I meant to make her."

"Let me see it, Bart! Oh, do just let me see it!"

"And the gentleman, Wanna, what do you think he did? He said that he would make my mother a present too."

"Did he, indeed? Well, that was kind of him!"

"Yes; and he has given me plenty of work for all the rest of the winter."

"And was that the present he made mother?"

"Oh, no, Wantje! he put a bright new five-franc piece in my hand, and told me to put that to the price of the neckerchief, that I might get an out-and-out handsome one."

"Five francs! And how much does the neckerchief cost, then?"

"Eight francs and a half, Wantje! Eight francs and a half!"

"Mercy upon us! Why, Bart dear, it would keep us three for a whole month! Oh, do let me see it!"

"You shall see it. But first I must tell you something else. After that, the gentleman took me into his house, to a room where ever so many copper pots were standing, just as it might be so

many milk-pails; I should think there must have been a thousand of them. And all these pots were full of sugar."

"A thousand pails full of sugar!" cried Wanna, lifting up her hands and eyes. "I suppose you're telling me the truth, Bart; but who in the world is to eat all that?"

"The rich people, to-be-sure, Wanna. Besides, just think how big the world is! Well, but, Wanna, the best's to come; he gave me five or six great packets of sugar-candy for mother, of all sorts of colors — white, yellow, red, brown, black; in fact, I don't know how many different colors!"

"Black?"

"Yes, there's some coal-black; mother will never know what it is. What a laugh we shall have! But come, our Bles will be catching cold. I'll show you the neckerchief, though; but take care, don't tumble it; and just let me see your hands, Wantje."

"Oh, they are quite clean! I've only just come from washing turnips."

And now Bart climbed up into the cart again to get the neckerchief, muttering all the while his apologies for the jealous vigilance of his precautionary measures.

"It's only, you see, Wanna dear, because really things of this kind oughtn't to be touched without gloves. Eight francs and a half!"

He came down again out of the cart with a paper parcel in his hand, which he carried and handled

with an air of much mystery, taking up his station beside the shaft, while he carefully and deliberately undid the string with which it was tied. Wanna hung over it the while, her large eyes sparkling with curiosity, and her whole countenance beaming with a smile of gladsome expectation. At last the neckerchief came to view. With speechless astonishment the maiden surveyed it as it lay there upon the outspread paper.

"Well, Wanna, what say you to it?" at last inquired her brother.

For a while she was quite unable to come to utterance; then, all at once jumping about and clapping her hands, she broke into passionate exclamations of delight. Her example soon set Bart going too; and there they both were, in their innocent joy, dancing about upon the snow like a couple of children, while Bles turned her head right round, as though to inquire what might be going on.

"How beautiful! heavens, how beautiful!" cried Wanna, at last recovering herself sufficiently for articulation. "Oh, how pleased mother will be! All red and blue and yellow! Why, it's enough to blind one!"

Meanwhile Bart sang, with a clear, ringing voice which might have been heard on the other side of the plantation,—

"Down with care, and away with sorrow!
Our feast's to-day; never mind to-morrow!"

And then followed, in endless repetition,—

"Oh, Wantje, Wantje!" and "Oh, Bart, Bart!"

Yet even endless repetitions must have an end.

"Come along! jump up!" cried Bart, at last.

"Directly, and then we'll make Bles go a bit!"

"No, no, Wantje, we must take our time, that we may consider well how we will manage it all."

And now the brother and sister mounted together upon the cart, and the horse went on.

"And have you the flowers too?" presently inquired the maiden, looking round the cart.

"They're under the seat, in the basket with the stone bottle of beer," answered Bart. "I was going to forget that I had a message for you from Frank."

"A message for me from Frank!" exclaimed Wanna, blushing to the tips of her ears, while Bart opened the basket and produced a bunch of very small flowers.

"See," he said; "Frank asked me to give you these from him."

"What shall I do with them?" she asked, abstractedly.

"Yes, but, Wanna, do you know what these flowers are called?" the brother went on. "I didn't know myself till Frank told me. 'Tis such a pretty name!"

"What is it, then?"

"They're called forget-me-nots."

Here the maiden abruptly turned her back upon her brother to hide the crimson blush with which

her whole face glowed. He laughed a while in his sleeve, and then resumed:—

"Wantje, is Cecilia with mother?"

"She has not been at our house to-day," was the reply. "I went over to the Abbey farm to see if any thing was the matter; but I could see nobody but that Thys, and he fell upon me as though I had come to steal something."

"And isn't Cecilia coming, then?"

"Yes, she'll come; she'll come toward evening, Thys said; but with such a smile! he looked just like a dog that's going to bite."

"Ah, well, that doesn't much matter, so she only comes; and then mother can see her home, if she does stay a little late. Come, Wanna, sit here by me; let's talk it over now how we are to manage it."

And now began a conversation which went briskly on, with many a gesture of delight and many a joyful exclamation on Wanna's part, but in so carefully-confidential a whisper that no word could have reached the ear of a passer-by.

At their own door, Wanna sprang from the cart and immediately entered the house; while Bart took out the horse and led it away to the stable, whither he also smuggled in his parcel and basket with much precaution and stratagem, which effected, he presently joined his mother and sister.

"Ah, good-day, mother!" he cried, as he entered the room; "here, take hold; I've a nice bit of money for you again."

And, while depositing some pieces of coin in her hand, he cast a summary glance round, the result of which, however, did not seem satisfactory, for his countenance instantly darkened and his features relaxed from their animation.

"Now, I dare say you think," observed his mother, "that I'm going to keep back your pocket-money from you for the bit of dinner that we gave Jan mason's widow and her children. No, Bart, my lad, you must have your glass of beer on Sundays as usual, and you deserve it well too."

Bart carelessly received the few pence which his mother returned him; and, as she proceeded into her bedroom to put away the money he had given her, went up to his sister, and, in a tone of deep discouragement,—

"Cecilia is not here!" he said.

"No, and she'll hardly come now," replied Wanna; "in another half-hour it will be dark. Well, we can tell her about it to-morrow. Come, go you up-stairs now, and keep mother in chat a while, as we said."

"Hadn't we better wait a little?" inquired Bart.

"Wait! Then we shall never get mother out of her bedroom again."

"Well, that's true enough. And yet I should have been so glad for Cecilia to be here. Well, then, look sharp, Wanna, and when all's ready give a knock with the blowpipe against the tongs."

In all haste, Wanna ran off to the stable, fetched

in the basket, set five or six plates on the table, into which she emptied the packets of sugar-candy, laid the beautiful new neckerchief half unfolded beside them, tied the flowers on to the stone bottle, and set three coffee-cups to drink out of; for glasses there were none in the house. Her arrangements accomplished, she raised such a clatter with tongs and blowpipe that her mother called out from above,—

"Take care down there! what are you about? Don't be breaking any thing!"

And almost in the same moment Bart came shouting down-stairs, his mother hastily following him.

It was a comic and yet touching spectacle which the good woman exhibited as her eyes fell upon the table laid out as has been described, and thence wandered in astonishment to the merry countenances of her children, from whom they silently demanded an explanation of the unlooked-for glories before them.

"Long live Johanna! Long live Johanna!" cried Bart and his sister together, as in the exuberant delight of youth they flew upon their old mother, cast their arms about her neck both at once, and almost stifled her with kisses.

But now again Bart releases her from his embrace, seizes the new neckerchief, throws it over her shoulders, springs to the wall, whence he takes a little mirror, and, holding it up to her, exclaims,—

"See, mother, see! that's your saint's-day pre-

sent! now you won't have to go to church in that miserable old thing any more."

At last she became aware what it was that her children's burst of joy signified. Her emotion was too much for her. Not a word could she utter, but gazed on the neckerchief in mute astonishment. At last a tear rolled down her cheek; she drew both her children to her bosom, and, kissing first one and then the other,—

"Oh, how good God is!" she exclaimed, in a stifled voice.

And now, while she still held her daughter in her arms, Bart hastened again to the table, filled the three cups with beer, and, with an expression at once of tenderness and solemnity,—

"Mother dear," he said, "here's to your good health! And may we long live together in love and well-doing! And may I keep my health to work for my good mother! And God grant us all his blessing, both here on earth and hereafter in heaven! Long live Johanna!"

But, just as he was about to put the cup to his lips he was suddenly interrupted by his sister's exclamations, who ran out of the room, crying, as she went,—

"Yonder is Cecilia! Ah me, there comes Cecilia!"

And immediately "Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Bart, hastily following her out.

But for a single instant the mother remained alone, until her children again appeared upon the

door-sill, accompanied by Cecilia. But, oh heavens! what a change had that little moment effected in them! All their vivacity had departed; sadness was on every feature, and with down-hung heads they walked beside their companion, in a very fever of anxious curiosity, and yet afraid to question her. Cecilia, on her part, approached the table without uttering a word, dropped into a chair, and then broke into an agony of sobs and tears, while the rest of the party stood looking on in mute astonishment and terror. It was Mother Ann who first approached her, took her by the hand, and inquired,—

"For heaven's sake, Cecilia dear, what then has happened? What sad misfortune?"

But no answer did she receive. Then, after waiting a while, Bart in his turn came and stood close by her, and in a heart-breaking tone, and with tears, so to say, in his voice,—

"Cecilia! Cecilia!" he exclaimed.

Whether it was that this cry, which seemed to burst forth from a breaking heart, struck straight to hers, or that the gush of tears had already somewhat relieved her, she raised her head, and, in a languishing voice,—

"Oh, my dear friends," she said, "I can hardly speak for sorrow! Let me first weep a while."

"Ah, Cecilia, Cecilia! do you want to kill me outright?" cried Bart, now quite beside himself; "what is it? For God's sake, speak!"

"Only think," she sobbed out in reply, "how

unhappy I am; this is the last time that you will see me here."

A varied series of sorrowful exclamations formed the response to this unexpected declaration.

"I am forbidden ever to come here again," she pursued, amid a flood of tears, "and ever to speak to any of you. And, alas! I must, I must obey!"

"Forbidden to speak to any of us again!" exclaimed the widow, astonished, not to say incredulous. "And why that, pray? What harm have we done to any one?"

"Ah! don't question me," replied the maiden, imploringly; "I can't bear to tell you all."

At this Bart wellnigh broke forth into fury. He ground his teeth; he clenched his fists. At last he cried,—

"Ah, yes! I know all about it! This is another of that serpent Thys's tricks! Look you, I never willingly harmed man or mouse in my life yet; but if ever I get that pest of the village into my hands, and don't wring his accursed head from his body, then——"

But here his mother hastily laid her hand upon his mouth and broke off the flow of vengeful utterance.

"Bart," said Cecilia, entreatingly, "if you have any friendship for me, put all such thoughts out of your head. It is my uncle himself that has forbidden me. There is nothing for it; it is my lot, and I must bear it."

"Oh heavens! and shall I then never see you

again?" cried the youth, in desperation; and, leaning his head upon the table, he burst into a flood of bitter tears.

"Here I must never come again," was the reply; "but when I sit up there at the Abbey farm whole days together, so lonely and desolate, all that time, my dear friends, yes, all of it, I shall be thinking of you. I never knew before how much I care for you all."

These last words only increased the universal grief; the whole party wept with broken hearts.

But presently Cecilia cast an anxious look out of doors. Probably she then observed something that struck her with sharp and sudden fear, for she rose from her seat all trembling, and began hastily to collect some small matters which lay upon a box by her.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed; "I was just forgetting myself. I only had leave to come here to fetch my work-things. Good-by! good-by! I must go."

The tone of nervous anxiety in which these words were spoken struck Bart not a little. He, too, looked outward in the same direction, and instantly a flash of indignation lighted up his eyes.

"Look!" he exclaimed, in a voice of concentrated fury, "look! yonder he stands in the road. Begone, Satan! away with you!"

And he was about to rush out of the house; but his mother cast her arms around his neck and

forcibly held him back, though he bellowed like an infuriated bull and made the most violent efforts to escape from her.

Meanwhile Cecilia had hastily taken a small gold cross from her bosom, and, placing it in Wanna's hand,—

"I promised mason Jan's widow," she said, "to do something for her. Now I cannot do as I meant; but here is a little cross that belonged to my mother, (God rest her soul!)—let her sell that, and buy bread for her children. And now, Mother Ann, Bart, Wanna, my dear friends all, farewell, and think of me and pray for me; pray that God may protect me. I shall die, die of grief and sorrow, waste and pine away; for——"

Her voice choked. Sobbing, and with her hands before her eyes, she rushed out of the house.

An instant afterward, and the inmates of the Chapel farm sat silently weeping. The neckerchief lay forgotten upon a chair; and already had the darkness of night descended upon the earth before any of them woke up from the mute depression into which sore grief had cast them one and all.

CHAPTER V.

As though Cecilia had been the angel whose presence had brought a blessing upon the Chapel farm, all its joy and gladness had vanished from it with her.

As for Bart, the joyous, spirited Bart, you would not have recognised him for the same person. Day after day, and all day long, he remained sunk in a mute reverie; his head, bowed down with a perpetual sorrow, stooped forward upon his chest; on his pale and lifeless countenance might be read sore suffering and deep despair. All his songs were forgotten; and, though he still went on working as before, yet his movements were slow and unsteady, as of one whose thoughts are wandering far away from what his hands are executing. Hardly was his attention to external things sufficiently awake to return a short and unsatisfactory answer to his mother's occasional attempts at consolation.

And thus in less than two months' time the happy, cheerful cottage had become as still, as lonesome-looking, and as melancholy, as the miser's dismal abode.

That which so grievously oppressed the young

man's heart was not, however, so much the mere absence of Cecilia as the total ignorance in which he was as to her lot. Many a varied spectacle of terror did his imagination conjure up before him; he saw her pining away and weeping, he heard her wailing and lamenting. And even as his waking life, so his sleep also was full of sudden suggestions of frightful import, which tortured him with perpetual and wearing unrest. Especially was this manifest when ever and anon over his work he would suddenly begin violently to tremble, or would grind his teeth fiercely together, or, again, would cast up a look of anxious supplication toward heaven.

And then, too, the feeling of his total inability to help her gnawed like a worm at his heart. Cecilia had so earnestly implored him to abstain from all interposition, and he had seen in her look that it was some secret and terrible power which coerced her into submission. Probably he would only have rendered her position still more unhappy by seeking vengeance upon him to whose evil influence he attributed all this misery. This last consideration it was which alone restrained him from open hostilities against Thys, and that not without difficulty, for there were moments when the boiling blood heated his brain wellnigh to madness.

From week's end to week's end Cecilia never stirred out of her uncle's house; not even did she show herself in the doorway of that sombre habita-

tion; but every Sunday she accompanied the old man and Thys to church. For three successive Sundays had Bart taken up his station at a point which she had necessarily to pass on her way, and each time, so soon as from afar off she could discern him, had she cast down her eyes and passed on without even noticing his salutation. But if Cecilia passed him by unnoticed, her uncle on the other hand cast at him looks of bitterness which seemed to convey terrible reproaches. Thys, too, regarded his young enemy with a side-glance of the most provoking mockery, while with the most lover-like smile he could make up upon his countenance he held Cecilia's arm locked in his, ostentatiously affected to whisper in her ear, and, in fact, altogether comported himself as though there was that between them that authorized something more than mere ordinary familiarity.

To express how deeply this sight wounded the young man's heart is quite impossible. The paleness of Cecilia's countenance, the tears which he fancied he traced upon her cheeks, were more than sufficient to pierce his heart with unutterable anguish; and the malignant scorn of Thys dropped poison into the wound which aggravated his sufferings tenfold.

Three times had he thus stood beside the churchpath, and three times had he returned from the encounter to weep his fill unseen under cover of the fir-trees; but so greatly had each of these dreary meetings affected him, that he had since

ceased to seek them, and now only watched from afar off and unnoticed the coming and going of the object of all his thoughts.

Jan the mason's widow was the only one who could occasionally throw a ray of consolation athwart the gloom which darkened her young benefactor's soul. She was at no loss to account for the inmost cause of all his sufferings, and ever and anon found means with well-timed calculation to touch the chord that stirred his heart with a momentary thrill of pleasure. Boldly at last she spoke out to him the magic word *love*, compelled him to lay open to her the secret of his griefs, and thus acquired the right of offering him consolation without disguise, by constantly speaking to him of Cecilia, and raising in him hopes that the absent loved one cherished for him in her bosom a feeling not dissimilar to his for her.

Indeed, since Cecilia's separation from her friends at the Chapel farm the poor beggar-woman had exhibited an activity that might be called quite surprising. From early in the morning till the last thing at night were she and her little Mieken out and about. No sooner was Bart at his work in the fields than immediately she was at his side with a word of comfort suggestive of happy prospects, and in a few moments off again, to return an hour or two afterward with a fresh dose of consolation. Had he perchance to pass the Abbey farm, he was sure to come across the widow and her child sitting at a convenient corner for spying

out what might be going on at the miser's house; did he pass through the village, there he met her coming or going, be the weather what it might; did he take his stand on the Sunday to get a far-off peep at Cecilia as she passed, he saw the widow advance resolutely into the middle of the road to beg an alms of Cecilia, regardless of the old man's angry gestures of repulse.

Was it a feeling of gratitude toward Bart and Cecilia that alone instigated the poor widow to these extraordinary exertions? or was not also the hatred which she bore to the unprincipled Thys a main ingredient in the causes of her activity?

At all events, whenever and wherever she might chance to come across the enemy of Bart and persecutor of Cecilia, so piercingly and mysteriously did her eyes meet his, so boldly uncompromising was their expression of menace and defiance, that by degrees an irresistible dread of her began to grow upon Thys, who soon became fully persuaded that the beggar-woman whom he had so often harshly repulsed had some insight into his designs upon the old miser's hoarded wealth. What it was that he might have to fear from her he knew not; but that was precisely the circumstance that irritated his uneasiness. It was not, moreover, unknown to him that the widow, as representing her husband, had a right to look for some small part in the inheritance; indeed, this knowledge it was which had excited him to an especial harshness toward her.

The anxiety which this feeling occasioned him, and which was aggravated by Uncle Jan's evident decline, made him more and more impatient to carry his designs into effect, and therefore more urgent with Cecilia to procure her consent, no matter by what means, to a speedy marriage. One day he would be all kindness and complaisance, seeking to win her over by the fairest promises; then again he would be bitterly spiteful, not to say savage, endeavoring, not only by threats, but sometimes even by positive ill-usage, to bully her into compliance, and even to work upon her by the fear that her life would not be safe should she persist in her opposition to his will. But, use what efforts he might, whether directly or through her uncle, whose mind he systematically poisoned against her by the basest calumnies and insinuations, she ever stood consistently firm in her refusal, entrenching herself for the most part in patient silence, which, however, again did her harm with the old man, attributing it as he did to the mere sullenness of obstinacy.

Early one morning Cecilia was sitting by the fireplace. She had lying upon her lap some half-finished article of female apparel. Nevertheless, she was not actually at work; her hands lay loosely upon her knees, her eyes were fixed intently but unconsciously upon the fireless hearth, and in a low voice she now and then dropped half-muttered words, which indicated the direc-

tion of her secret thoughts. The name of Bart and that of her uncle fell ever and anon from her lips, accompanied by deep sighs; but her countenance remained unchanged, motionless as the features of a marble statue. Suddenly a noise of footsteps struck her ears a deathly paleness overspread her face, and she trembled as though in frightened expectation of some horrible apparition. And probably her apprehensions were accurately fulfilled, for one of the doors presently opened, and Thys came in.

Cecilia bowed her head still lower, as though to avoid seeing him; but else she remained perfectly motionless. On his countenance stood a smile of such malignity, such venomous cruelty, as in truth fully to justify the terror with which she seemed to regard him. Without saying a word, he came close up to her, under the pretence of seeking for something among the ashes with the tongs, and as he did so set down his foot so heavily upon hers that a thrill of pain darted through all her body; still, difficult as it was, she maintained her silence. Then, moving his elbows hither and thither about her head, he contrived to strike her more than one sharp blow with them in the face, but still without extorting a word of complaint from her lips. All she did was to draw herself in, to make herself small, so to say, like one that looks for ill-treatment and accepts it with helpless submission. After repeated attacks of a similar kind, under which

the poor girl passively allowed herself to be thrust about, first one way, then the other, like a lifeless object, at last Thys spoke.

"You sit there like a log of wood!" he roughly exclaimed. "Do get out of my way, can't you!"

And as he uttered the words he pushed her so violently by the shoulder that her head struck heavily against the chimney-piece. Still in the same unbroken silence she resumed her former position, but this time was unable to restrain a gush of tears, the shock and the pain for the moment overbearing her will. The cruel tormentor now retired by two or three steps backward, crossed his arms upon his chest, stood a while gazing on her with a hideous grin of spite, and again spoke.

"I told you yesterday," he said, "that to-day is your last chance; so think well of it; there is nothing so bad but what you may look for it to-morrow if the sun goes down to-day without my having your 'yes.'"

And, as Cecilia still neither stirred nor spoke, he became positively furious.

"Ah!" he cried; "you won't speak, won't you? that's all that's left you now, it seems! but I'll make an end of that too; I'll find a way to loose your tongue, I'll warrant you! Come, let's hear you speak!"

And he darted upon her, seized her by both shoulders with the gripe of a vice, and shook her so violently hither and thither that her head

turned round with it. And all the while he fixed his eyes on hers with so ferocious an expression that the poor victim trembled in every limb. In truth, she was not far from the thought that he was about to murder her.

"Speak!" at last he bellowed out, "or I'll crush your shoulder-bones between my fingers!"

A low cry burst forth from the maiden's breast; she fell upon her knees, and, with uplifted hands,—

"Oh, Thys, Thys!" she exclaimed, "what harm have I done to you? If you want to kill me, for mercy's sake do it at once, and don't torture me to death piecemeal in this way!"

The ruffian regarded for a moment the poor girl, who knelt trembling at his feet, with an intense feeling of cruel satisfaction.

"Ho, ho!" at last he exclaimed, with a savage laugh; "haven't I always told you that I should have you on your knees before me yet? You didn't believe it could be, did you? and now there you are!"

"Mercy, forgiveness, I implore you!" continued Cecilia; "I will do what you will—be the slave of your every wish—obey your every hint; I will be your veriest servant."

"That's not what I want."

"I'll give up all my share in my uncle's property to you; I'll beg him to make a will leaving it to you, and, if it's necessary, or will make it any stronger, I'll confirm his will myself before

witnesses, and do all I can to secure every thing to you. But for God's sake leave me a little rest, a little peace. My head wanders; I feel—I fear I shall go mad."

And still, without rising from her seat, she bowed her head upon her breast.

"All that's mere idle talk," replied Thys; "but there's another way of making me the best fellow in the world, and that way you know well enough. For to-day you have the choice open to you; to-morrow it will be too late. If you won't come into my plans, you may as well say farewell to the light of the sun; my hatred shall waste you and wear you out bit by bit; you shall perish like snow before the slow fire of my revenge. Ha, ha! you see that you don't half know me yet! And now answer me: will you be my wife or not?"

Without answering a word, she rose from her knees, returned to her chair, sat down, and pressed her hand over her eyes. Thys also took a seat, and continued, coolly and calmly,—

"Look you here, Cecilia. Before I make up my mind to proceed to the uttermost with you, I'll try this once more to see if I can make you hear reason. I really can't make you out. It's every girl's destination to be married, a little sooner or a little later. What can it signify what her husband's name is, so that he's in case to keep his wife comfortably and make her life pleasant? And that I shall be able to do that

you don't for a moment doubt, I think. No doubt young people are apt to have great ideas about love and sympathy and friendship, and to think of them as things that have a real and great worth in life; but, take my word for it, that's all a dream,—a dream that passes away with the idleness of youth. There's only one thing that keeps its value throughout, that supplies the place of every thing, and is, in fact, the inexhaustible fund from which every thing comes. That one thing is money. Well, now, money we shall have enough of, and to spare; so what can there be to be anxious or sad about? Because there will be no love, esteem, friendship, and all the fine words to the end of the chapter, in our married life? What's the worth of a bucket of water to the owner of the spring from which it all flows and flows on forever? You don't answer me; but I understand well enough what you would answer; you would say that it's not merely that you don't love me, but that you downright hate me. But hatred—what is hatred? A dream!—a feeling that, just like love, grows up and passes away with its cause. You hate me because I torment you, don't you? Well, then, marry me, and you shall see how pleasant I'll make myself; and your hatred will pass off along with the reasons that you have for it. Well, what say you? must I get angry again, and fetch the words out of you with hard knocks?"

At this last question, uttered in a tone of gloomy menace, the poor girl began again to tremble violently. In a tone of piteous entreaty, she replied,—

"Oh, forgive me! I cannot speak otherwise than as I feel. Look you, Thys; you don't know what it is to sit thus alone here for whole days together, thinking and dreaming and suffering. The spirit takes a deep look into things as they really are, and gets at a great deal that else it would quite pass by. Do you know, Thys, what marriage is?"

"Why, of course, it's a partnership of two people who lay their chances in life together to get the more advantage out of them," answered Thys; "just neither more nor less than as two people in business put their capitals together that they may drive a greater trade."

"Would to God it were but that!" she replied, sighing; "then perhaps I might bring myself to do as you wish."

"It is nothing else, take my word for it," reiterated Thys.

"No, no! it is the annihilation of the woman's individual personality," she went on, with vehement emphasis; "an annihilation to which God's law, and the feeling of duty, and inexorable necessity, alike subject her. As I am, unmarried, I am at least an independent being; I have a will of my own, and may resist you without sinning against God and my conscience; and if in the end

I die of a broken heart under your persecutions, I may hope to find the recompense of my sufferings in another world. But once married to you, once your wife, then I must carry out all your wishes, subject myself in every thing to your will, belong to you, in fact, as a slave to a master; and that it is that makes me shudder at the thought alone of what you want of me."

This discourse seemed to throw Thys into utter astonishment, not so much at the matter of it as at the calm and earnest tone and manner in which it was delivered. It was with intense irritation that he beheld such an exhibition of steadfastness and independent will in one whom he had regarded as at last utterly worn-out and broken. He soon recovered himself, however, and in a few moments answered, with a jeering laugh,—

"Now I understand you. Upon my word, you see deeply into things! Why, I believe you'd be capable, if you did marry me, of refusing me the wedding-kiss!"

"Ah," cried she, despairingly, "the wedding-kiss from you! that would kill me! And if after that I could live a single day, I should hate myself then more than I hate you now!"

Thys rose from his seat, and, looking her full in the face, with a savage smile,—

"So you'll rather die, then?" he said; "die slowly, bit by bit, as if you were being pricked to death with pins?"

She gave him no answer, and he too now was

silent, and remained for a considerable interval deeply lapsed in thought. At last, in a careless tone, he resumed:—

"So be it, then; I see there's no hope whatever of bringing you to reason; I must get my ends in another way. I suppose you don't know yet whether my fingers are of flesh or of iron, and I shall have to show you. However, for this morning we've had enough of it, and we'll save the rest for the afternoon. Do you think over, in the mean while, what marriage is; perhaps it may be of some use to you in the other world!"

And as he spoke these last words he stepped up to the outer door, and stood for a moment on the threshold, anxiously looking about him in every direction.

"That accursed quean is not there now. Sharp's the word!" at last he muttered; and then, turning back toward the room, and addressing himself to Cecilia, with vengeance flashing in his eyes,—

"I have to go out for a few moments," said he. "Do you bolt the door inside. Perhaps Frank Dalinckx will be coming to pay his interest that's due; if he does, make him wait. And if you open the door to another soul alive——"

He raised his hand, crooked his fingers together like claws, and, with a motion as of grasping her by the throat, and a murderous expression on his countenance,—

"You understand me!" he said.

And with these words he left her, trembling

with terror and the agitation of the scene, and proceeded along the footpath toward the village.

Hardly was he outside the door when Cecilia ran from her seat, hastily shot the bolt, and then fell upon her knees in a dark corner of the chamber, and with folded hands sent up a prayer to God for protection and deliverance. A dismal silence reigned around. Her solitude was complete. Her prayer was broken by agonizing sobs, with which the loaded bosom struggled in relieving itself. Ever and anon the silence would be broken by the wind howling in the chimney, or the old building, shaken by the blast, would crack again; then Cecilia would start up in terror, and look, pale and trembling, toward the door, each time to sink back into her former attitude and to go on with her tears and prayers.

But presently she seemed to herself to hear a light tap at the door, so mysteriously and so stilly given as to be scarcely audible; nevertheless she rose from her knees and approached the quarter whence it seemed to come, and soon the tap was distinctly repeated.

"Who is there?" she asked, just as stilly and mysteriously as though sympathetically affected by the character of the signal.

"Are you alone, Cecilia?" asked a voice through the keyhole.

"Ah, dear Kate!" answered Cecilia, recognising the voice; "for God's sake go away! go away, and don't let yourself be seen at our door!"

"You are alone, then? Let me in! do let me in!" responded Kate, in an imploring voice.

"I mustn't! Oh, do go away! I'm in a terror for fear he should see you."

A moment's pause ensued. Presently the voice from without was again heard, this time in a tone of piteous supplication:—

"Oh, Cecilia, my poor Mieken is lying here at the last gasp, dying with hunger on your door-sill, and just a morsel of bread would save her! And you, Cecilia—you can never find in your heart to refuse me just that bit of bread?"

This appeal went to Cecilia's heart, she in her agitation not taking time to consider how far it was likely to be grounded in truth and not a mere stratagem to obtain admittance.

She stretched forth her trembling hand toward the bolt, which yet at first she did not venture to touch, eyeing it nervously, as though it was likely to harm her.

"Quick! oh, quick!" moaned the voice from without, "or it will be too late."

With feverish haste Cecilia drew back and opened, or rather half-opened, the door; but the widow, who had been watching her opportunity, immediately forced her way in. Her entrance once effected, her first care was to anticipate Cecilia's expressing the astonishment which manifested itself upon her countenance in an audible form. Laying her hand upon the maiden's lips, and speaking in a low, mysterious tone,—

"Hush!" she said. "My child? Oh, she's at the Chapel farm, safe and sound! I was obliged to deceive you; for I must speak to you. Where's your uncle?—up-stairs? Hush, then! he mustn't hear us."

"Oh, go away, Kate, do! Thys will be back directly," said Cecilia, imploringly.

The widow went up to the cupboard like one well acquainted with the localities, took a loaf out, and cut a slice from it. Then, shutting up the cupboard and turning to Cecilia,—

"There, this is the alms that you have given me," she said; "say nothing else to him, good or bad. I have seen him, and know where he's gone to; he's at the notary's. Don't beg me to go away now; I have been three months on the look-out for such a chance as this; yes, full three months have I watched the Abbey farm from morning till evening, to get speech of you alone. I am determined to know what it is that's going on here. It is not for nothing that Thys is with the notary; he has some business of consequence in hand that won't be so soon settled; he will not be back again just yet. By-the-way, I mean to be at the bottom of that too before I've done; but you're as pale and thin as a corpse! Why, what's going on here then, that makes you waste in this way?"

"Ah, Kate! dear Kate! I mustn't tell you."

"Mustn't tell me!" repeated the widow, scornfully; "why, what are you afraid of, then? there's death in your face already. I suppose *he* has for-

bidden you to speak? Of course, he wants you to hold your tongue and pine away; he wants to kill you, in fact. All he cares for is to be rid of you, no matter how, to have you out of his way, that he may clutch your share of the inheritance too. And are you so crushed and broken, so worn-out, that you can't stand up against him, and let him carry it all his own way just by your cowardice? Isn't it, think you, a downright sin against God to give up your own cause so and let wickedness gain its ends for want of a little spirit? Perhaps you'll say that it's your own affair; but, even if it was no sin—and it is a great one—to throw away your own life so, what will you say if there's some one else that you're killing at the same time?—some one that loves you? that can't live without you? that's wasting and pining away for you?"

"My God, my God!" exclaimed the poor girl, in a desponding tone, "is Bart ill, then?"

"How can you ask such a question, Cecilia?" was the reply. "You yourself, then—you have never thought of him, never mourned after him? It has been 'out of sight out of mind' with you?"

Cecilia sank upon a chair and began to weep bitterly. At last, her voice broken with sobs,—

"Kate," she said, "perhaps I am not doing well to let you see all that is in my heart. Oh, I have suffered more than he! for at all events he has the sun, the fields, the open air; he has friends to speak to and kind words to hear; he has his mother; while I—I hear nothing but scolding and

abuse; I see nothing but the four bare walls of this prison, unless when in my solitude his name involuntarily uttered by my own voice strikes my ear, or a day-dream vividly conjures up his image before me."

A smile of satisfaction lighted up the widow's features. Tenderly she took the suffering girl by the hand, and,—

"You do love him, then, Cecilia?" she said.

The maiden made no reply. Silently she hung down her head to hide the blush that crimsoned on her cheeks.

"Ah, Cecilia, do but just say that! tell me that you love him!"

"I can't, Kate! you'll not keep my secret—my soul's secret!"

"But, Cecilia, if my telling out this secret might perchance save a life?"

"Ah me! well then, let him know that which I've never till now ventured to confess plainly to myself. It was the separation from him that made me suffer most; and, if I die, my soul will carry with it to God's presence the thought of him."

Here Kate rose from her seat, half opened the door, and looked out into the distance across the fields. Then, returning,—

"I don't see Thys yet," she said. "But, come now, Cecilia, pluck up a little spirit and fight your own battle with him; he is but a coward!"

"But, Kate, tell me now, is it really true? Is Bart really so ill?"

"Well, that he's downright to call ill I won't say; but he's pale, and thin, and pining, like yourself, Cecilia. He's near enough to the grave to tumble in, if he gets no comfort. But now I have the right medicine for his disease. And now let me hear, Cecilia dear,—tell me what has been going on here for these three last unhappy months; but make haste about it, for we've no time to lose."

"Well, then, listen, Kate. You'll not say a word of what I tell you to any one, will you?—and yet what signifies if you do? he can but kill me! Well, then, Thys wants me to marry him."

"If I didn't think so!" murmured the widow.

"And he's put it into my uncle's head to want it too, and day after day the poor old man is at me about it; but I'll die a thousand times first! There's no kind of persecution that I haven't had to suffer. I'm abused and scolded at; I'm half starved; I'm overdone with work; I live in a constant alarm and terror; and—but for God's sake, Kate, not a word of this to Bart—yes, Kate, I'm knocked about, pinched, and beaten like a poor brute beast."

"Good heavens! what's all this I hear?" cried Kate, lifting up her hands. "Why it's just as though you'd fallen into the hands of banditti! I tell Bart about it indeed! God preserve me from it! if he heard a word about such goings on, there'd soon be bloodshed, sure enough; and then he'd have to pay for it, poor fellow! But your uncle! has he quite taken leave of his wits, then?"

"My uncle, poor man! he's deceived and led away. He takes all that I say for mere wicked falsehood; in fact, he's bewitched, Kate. If I could only get to speak with him alone;—but all day long he is shut up alone up-stairs, far away behind, and not even Thys can get at him. He just comes down to meals, and then Thys is always by, and contrives to twist all my words, so that whatever I say or do only irritates my uncle, as though not a word ever came out of my mouth but deceit, evil-speaking, and falsehood. Sometimes I'm really in doubt myself whether I mustn't be out of my senses and saying what I shouldn't without meaning it. Now at last I've made up my mind to my lot; I bow my head and suffer in silence, in the thought that it's God's will for me that I should leave the world so."

"Horrible!" said the widow, with a long-drawn sigh, or rather groan, at once of compassion and indignation; "but why don't you escape, get away, from this hell and the devil that torments you?"

"Ah, dear Kate, more than once an indefinite dread of something more horrible still has passed across me, and I've looked toward the door; but——"

"But you were weak! You were a coward!" interrupted Kate, angrily and scornfully.

"But my poor old uncle!—shall I leave him alone in this desolate den, where no mortal ever comes, to the tender mercies of that fiend of treachery and cruelty? And then, too, the dis-

grace!—a young girl running away from her home!"

Here she stopped, for Kate had risen from her seat, and was gone to the door to be on the look-out.

"Yonder he comes," observed the latter, composedly returning to her seat; "if he sees me, just tell him I begged of you and you gave me a slice of bread for pity's sake. And don't lose your courage! I'll find a way to help you; and if I can't do it speedily enough, why, escape from this house, on which the curse of God rests."

But the tyrant's return had awakened Cecilia's terror of him, which for a moment had slumbered, in all its force. Pale and trembling, she stretched out her hands toward the widow, and could only repeat, imploringly,—

"Oh, go away! go away! he'll do you a mischief!"

"I'm not afraid of him," answered Kate. "Be of good heart, dear Cecilia! you shall see me again."

The poor widow left the house and walked slowly away. As she went out she could notice that Thys had observed her and was making double haste on his way homeward. Retiring therefore a stone's-throw or two on one side, she took up a convenient station, murmuring to herself,—

"I dare say now he'll be ill-using Cecilia; I'll listen at the keyhole and hear what goes on."

Presently, however, she noticed that Thys had left the footpath and was making his way straight to the place where she was standing. She on her part stood her ground, and calmly awaited his approach, which, from the moment of his being within hearing, he made amid a volley of oaths and threats. These, however, she received nothing disconcerted, regarding him the while with so provoking a smile of contempt that at last he felt compelled to come to a pause, though certainly not from any abatement of his rage.

"Who was it let you in?" he began, quivering with suppressed fury; "what have you been about at the Abbey farm?"

"Oh, terrible things, indeed!" answered Kate, scornfully; "I've been begging for half an hour for a bit of bread, and at last Cecilia has given it me. It isn't everybody that's as hard-hearted as you are."

"Let me see the bread!" he replied, in a tone which sufficiently implied that he did not believe a word of her story.

The widow showed him the slice with which she had provided herself. Thys took it in his hand, looked at it first on one side, then on the other, gave it her back, and resumed:—

"However, it's all one what you were there for. Just you stay away from our place, or you shall repent it."

"Pooh! so much for your threats!" answered Kate, undauntedly, with a snap of her fingers;

"what can you do to me? but I, poor beggar-woman as I am, I'll trip you up yet!"

"You!" cried Thys, now beside himself with rage, and raising his hand as though to strike her. "Another word, and I break your neck!"

But Kate only pointed with her hand toward a field in which three or four peasants were at work.

"Look you there, yonder, in that field," she said; "all those people there would be glad enough to do me a good turn and you a bad one. Just lay a single finger upon me, and I'll cry murder upon you! there will be no want of witnesses to say that you're capable of that, and worse too. So, if you wouldn't like to make acquaintance with the police, why, keep your hands to yourself."

Trembling with irritation, but cowed nevertheless by her coolness, Thys stood staring upon her and all amazed, while she, after a moment's pause, with a provoking smile, went on:—

"Ha, ha! I suppose you think you've got all the cunning in the world to yourself! but it's just possible that you're mistaken there. You fancy that nobody knows what goes on at the Abbey farm! Pray, is it to-day or to-morrow that the old man's will is to be made?"

"What? What's that you say?" cried Thys, astonished and quite taken aback; "it's not true!"

"It's not true, isn't it? And pray what makes you stand there like a schoolboy that's just going to be caned? But mind what you're about; there

shall be fair play for every one. And, keep the doors of the Abbey farm as close as you may, remember the law can open them."

"The law! the law! what grounds can the law have for doing that, pray?"

"Hark you, Thys; you know just as well as I do that grounds are easily found or easily made. And now good-by to you till we meet again."

And with a loud laugh, and leaving Thys strangely disconcerted, she went on her way.

For a while he stood gazing after her with an air of surprise, not to say consternation, and then turned back lost in thought toward the Abbey farm. More than once on his way he stood still, rubbed his forehead, stamped with his feet, and at last entered the house, so intently occupied with his own cogitations that he passed on through the room in which Cecilia was, apparently without noticing her presence, and disappeared through a second door in the back part of the building.

CHAPTER VI.

On the following morning the sun rose majestically in the clear blue sky. It was by this time the middle of May. Still, the fine days had hitherto been but few and far between, and it was only by slow and imperceptible degrees that tree and field had been putting on their green spring dress. During the night, however, the wind had gone about from the north to the opposite quarter, and now wafted the warm exhalations of the south, as a balsam fresh from the central region of life and heat, in genial undulations over the earth. The sun beamed brightly but mildly over the glad face of nature, which shone forth fresh in youthful beauty, with all the attraction of a lovely maiden flower-crowned with her bridal wreath. From every tree, from every bush, resounded a universal chorus of blithe sounds; aloft in air the lark trilled his merry notes; myriads of little creatures, of every variety of form and color, hummed and hovered about the foliage or frolicked playfully among the grass of the banks; the very earth itself swarmed with life. In fact, it was nature's fair-day!

Over the Chapel farm too the sun shed out

his gladsome light; there too the birds made the air resound with their songs of love and happiness. But amid all this movement and this universal exultation of nature, the lonesome dwelling stood as silent and as still as if it alone, with all belonging to it, was still buried in the sleep of winter.

Mother Ann was sitting by herself beside the hearth, busied in trimming vegetables for the pot. But it was but little of her attention that she was bestowing upon the occupation of her hands. Ever and anon her eyes wandered restlessly around, as of one that in vain seeks to escape the domination of some haunting thought; and, in fact, the whole expression of her countenance told of deepest sadness and discouragement.

While there the good woman of the house sat and thought, Bart came in with some implement of husbandry in his hand. Certainly, he must have been fatiguing himself with a severe job of hard work, for his back was bowed, and his step was slow and heavy, as, without greeting or sign of recognition, he passed on through the room as though he had not remarked his mother's presence.

She meanwhile followed her son with her eyes. The absence of mind with which he passed her by evidently distressed her beyond measure; and hardly had he disappeared through the interior door than silent tears began to trickle down

the sad mother's cheeks as she bowed her head over her work.

Some moments afterward, Wanna came in with a pail of milk. She set her pail down, and was about to lift off the cover of the great caldron; but in the same moment she noticed the tears upon her mother's cheek, and held her hand. An expression of impatient annoyance crossed her countenance; she approached her mother, took her by the arm, and shook her pretty sharply, adding, in an aggrieved tone of voice,—

"What, again? Why, it's always the same! You'll soon both of you be quite laid up, and leave me to do all the work by myself. If I didn't bear up well, I'm sure I don't know what would come of it!"

But no answer did she obtain, save in a fresh gush of tears. Then in a tone of entreaty she resumed:—

"Come, mother, do cheer up a bit! Why, I shall never be able to bear up much longer myself, with nothing but melancholy faces to look at every day and all day long! There's Bart speaks never a word, but comes and goes like a shadow; and you, mother, the moment you're alone, break out into tears. I must for once speak my mind right out, mother: there's neither sense nor reason in it; or else there's something under it all that I do not understand, for nobody says a word to me, and I live here as if I wasn't one of yourselves."

The poor mourner took her daughter's hand, and pressed it, as though to testify of undiminished affection. Then, in a tone of lamentation,—

"Wanna, my dear child," she said, "don't you see that your brother is pining away? Don't you observe how strangely his eyes wander, and how pale and thin he gets? And when you look at him, don't you at times feel all in a tremble for fear of its coming to worse still?"

"Heavens, mother!" cried Wanna, nervously, at the same time wiping away a tear, "what can you mean? Bart is sad, and gets thin, I know that; but I know very well too why it is. One may pine away a little with that sort of sorrow, but with time one gets over it nevertheless. And what business, too, had he to be setting his heart on Cecilia? She's no match for him; for we're just poor folk that must slave for our daily bread, and she — she's rich, or will be. Why don't you set well at him, to get the folly out of his head? But no; you just cry about it, and let him take his way. Oh, if only I was his mother!"

"Child, child!" sighed the mother, "if you did but know all I have done to bring him to reason!—prayers and tears, scolding and coaxing: I've tried every thing, and every thing has been in vain. He acknowledges his folly, and that I'm right in all I say about it; promises to do

his best to forget her, falls on his knees, and begs my forgiveness——"

"Yes, and you, mother—you give it him directly, don't you know?"

"And I, Wanna dear, I that am his mother, I see well all that's going on in my poor child's heart, and I can't find it in mine to be hard upon him. You can't understand it, Wanna; we're no two of us just alike in these things; and I dare say I shouldn't understand it myself, if I hadn't once in my life had occasion to see what love can bring a man to when it's crossed. Bart's of a nervous constitution, just like his father. Well now, Wanna, would you believe that your poor father, before we were married, lay at the point of death, so as already to have received the last sacraments, because our parents had separated us and he wasn't allowed to see me?"

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Wanna, in sudden terror; but added, almost immediately recovering herself, "well, but father got well over it in the end, for all that; didn't he, mother?"

"So he did, Wanna; but how? Our parents had quarrelled about a right of way across a field, and things had come to such a pass between them that they were at downright daggers drawn, and couldn't bear to hear one another's names. Well, I wasn't allowed to see your father; and he, poor fellow, who was more in love with me than I knew of, pined away till he

lay upon his death-bed. Thanks be to God, the good priest, out of pity for the poor young fellow, reconciled our parents, and I was allowed to visit him before he died. The tears come into my eyes when I think of that day; I won't speak of it; but a month after that he was able to go to church with me and our parents for us to be promised* together."

Wanna was looking hard at her mother, with glistening eyes.

"Look you, Wanna," resumed the latter, "your father was just a poor peasant, such as we are now; but sure and certain it is, there was that in him that made him one of a thousand, and so it may well be with our poor Bart too."

The maiden shook her head in thought, with her eyes fixed on the ground. After a few moments she looked up again.

"It's strange enough," she said, "that one person should pine away out of liking for another, just because he's of a nervous temperament; for my part, I don't see how it can be. But, mother, our poor father was a match for you; so that wasn't so out-of-the-way. With Bart and Cecilia the matter's quite different; that can never come to any good. And so he must just knock the foolish thought out of his head."

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* The Catholic church recognises the espousals as a distinct solemnity preparatory to marriage; and the practice, under various modifications of form, still prevails extensively on the continent among Protestants as well as Catholics.

Mother Ann meanwhile had sunk away into a deep reverie; she paid no attention to what Wanna was saying, and gazed despairingly upon the ground. After thus sitting a while in silence, she sighed heavily, and began to speak as to herself alone:—

"He suffers like a martyr! Kate told him something yesterday that made his eyes light up with joy; but she told him something too that made him grind his teeth with vexation. And last night in his sleep he talked and cried and called out—it quite gave me a fright as I listened to him! And now this morning he's all languid, and paler than ever, and his eyes look so dim and dead. Alas, alas! my poor Bart! my unhappy child!"

In the same moment that these last words fell from her lips and sounded through the room in a tone painfully expressive of heartfelt grief—just in this same moment Bart came in through the back door with a rake in his hand. Struck by the tone of his mother's voice, he stood still, and for a while fixed his eyes steadfastly on hers, from which the tears fell fast. Then, slowly going up to her, he pressed his lips to her forehead, and as from his eyes two warm drops fell upon it, in a sweet and almost inaudible voice,—

"My poor dear mother!" he said; "ah, forgive me! indeed, I cannot help it!"

And again turning about, with his head bowed and one hand before his eyes, he passed on out of the house.

Even under the bright sunlight and amid the universal gladness of nature which surrounded him, Bart still could not lift his head. With stooping gait and apathetic air he dawdled on along the footpath like an old man bowed down under the weight of years. One might almost have thought that as he was walking he was occupied in looking for something among the grass.

From time to time he stood still, muttered something to himself, plucked a leaf from a tree or bush, rubbed it to pieces in his hand, and then, still murmuring, resumed his course; or he gazed absently upon the insects which so joyously fluttered hither and thither in the air, or pursued one another on the ground; or he unconsciously dismembered the petals of a flower or listened to the answering call of the birds.

What it was that all this said to him he very likely knew not himself; but, for all that, the effect upon him was profound, and threw him off into a deep reverie, till, waking up again, he slowly resumed his onward way.

But all at once, as though suddenly seized upon by some more potent thought, he came to a distinct halt, and, fixing his eyes upon the ground at his feet, in much emotion murmured out,—

"Cecilia, since yesterday I know what you suffer:—how you are ill-treated even with blows! how you are pining away with desolation of heart! And all the while you love me! Oh, how cowardly

and how weak does sorrow make one! I have neither spirit nor strength more! I'm nervous and afraid; I know not what to do; I can't collect myself; my thoughts are all confused; I'm sick in body and soul."

A sad and bitter smile distorted his pale countenance.

"Sick! sick!" he cried; "yes, put a fine name on your cowardice! But if I had but spirit or power to act, what should I do? Let her die? Her that loves me? Oh, that would be ill done indeed! But—but what then? Kill him?"

And at this question he started back, as if he had suddenly perceived a poisonous serpent in his way, ready to spring upon him with open jaws. An inarticulate groan of horror broke slowly from his bosom; then he resumed:—

"Ah! there is a God above us!—my immortal soul!—and then, my mother! No, no; there's no help for it but to bow my neck and waste away with sorrow; to bear my cross, bear it on to the churchyard. Ah me! ah me!"

And again he pursued his course, sad and spiritless as before, pressing his hand to his forehead as though he feared its bursting.

While the young peasant, thus full of suffering and of despair, was making his way along the shady footpath, which with every step he made was bringing him nearer to the Abbey farm, without however his being able to catch a glimpse of it, there was passing in that habitation a scene of

oppression more cruel still than any he could have had the heart to imagine.

The door opened. On the threshold appeared a young girl, pale and thin, with a heavy bundle under her arm and the other hand pressed to her eyes. A man with an odious smile upon his countenance kept thrusting her on from behind till she was two or three steps forward from the door-sill.

There for a while the poor girl stood still, as though it was difficult for her to leave this spot; nevertheless, urged on by the threatening words and gestures of the man, she at last proceeded slowly along the path, and turned across the fields beside a plantation of young oaks, which soon concealed the Abbey farm from her view. She had not yet raised her head, and still held her hand before her eyes, no doubt to conceal the tears which trickled from them down her cheeks.

Presently—whether it was the warmth of the sun, or the bright light that surrounded her, or the voices of jubilation that struck her ear from every side, or rather all of these together that affected her nervous system—she stood still, and dropped her hand from before her eyes.

With an admiration that seemed partly the result of novelty she gazed into the skyey depths, and let her eye wander with more and ever more delight over the wide creation. By degrees an indescribable smile shaped itself upon her countenance; her bosom swelled; her head set itself erect upon her delicate neck; her eyes sparkled with a new light;

she lifted both her hands aloft, and, in a low but thrilling tone, exclaimed,—

"Liberty! liberty!"

And she made a motion with her arms through the air, as though seeking to clutch with her hands the infinite space itself.

For some little while she remained thus rapt out of herself, till her eyes had wandered over and enjoyed every object that was within their reach. Then gradually her self-consciousness returned. Her head sank again slowly upon her breast, the old sadness chased the smile from her countenance; again she bent her eyes upon the ground and her thoughts upon her sad lot.

Again a little while, and she proceeded on her way along the footpath, dreamily musing as she went. But suddenly, as she turned an angle of the plantation, a cry of astonishment burst from her breast.

"Bart!" she exclaimed; and even he it was that stood paralyzed with surprise before her.

The first impression of this unexpected meeting called up a smile of heaven's own bliss upon the countenance of each; but a glance at one another sufficed in a moment to cloud it over with an expression of sadness and even affright. Without speaking, they both bowed their heads and wept bitterly. Bart was the first to raise his eyes again and to find his voice for an expression of sorrow and condolence.

"Cecilia, poor girl, how thin and pale you are!"

"And you, Bart, I hardly know you again!" the maiden sobbed out, still without looking up.

"I!" exclaimed the young man, desperately; "what does that matter? But you, Cecilia, that are goodness and kindness itself, an angel here upon earth,—that you should have to suffer so! that you should die, like a poor dumb lamb, under that false villain's hands! It makes my blood boil to think of it. God be merciful to me, or I shall surely one day crush that venomous beast's head! But that bundle, Cecilia? where are you going to?

"They've turned me out of doors," she sighed, with a fresh burst of tears.

"Turned you out of doors!" exclaimed Bart, with indignation and wrath upon his countenance.

But this first impulse was soon gone by, and gradually the expression of his countenance changed into one of growing satisfaction, and even pleasure, till at last, beginning to see clearly in the matter, he exclaimed, with transport,—

"Turned you out of doors! What! for good and all?"

"Yes, for good and all," was the sad reply.

"And you weep, Cecilia?" he cried. "What! you've been months long sitting mourning in a gloomy prison, you've been at the mercy of a jailer that has beaten you and tormented you to death; and, just as we were both in despair, as there seemed no escape for us but the churchyard, God gives you your liberty again—you're

free—and you weep over it! Oh, see, see how I take it!"

And he threw himself on his knees upon the ground, lifted his hands aloft to heaven, and, with a voice as of one inspired, exclaimed,—

"O God, Thou hast released her! Thanks, oh thanks, for this thy merciful kindness!"

Here his voice failed him; but he still remained on his knees and murmured on an inaudible but doubtless still intenser thanksgiving.

As for Cecilia, she gazed upon him at once in surprise and admiration. For he was really a sight for admiration as he knelt there, his mild soul showing forth upon his countenance, his glistening eyes raised up to God! So intense was the expression of thankfulness to heaven that beamed upon his features, that Cecilia, rapt into a sympathetic transport, forgot for a moment her own circumstances, while an instinctive feeling of gladness sunk into her bosom.

And now, rising from his knees, Bart instantly perceived the changed expression of Cecilia's countenance;—no smile, but something of that ineffable serenity which tells at once of peace of mind, of happiness. He seized her by the hand.

"Come, come," he exclaimed; "my poor mother will be so glad! Come, it's so well to live in our house! And your chair is standing just in the old place; not a soul has sat in it since. And every thing there is mourning after you. Quick, come along!"

But she resisted him, and would not follow in the direction he sought to lead her.

"What is it now, Cecilia?" at last he exclaimed, uneasily; "won't you come home to our house, then?"

"I must go on to the town," she replied; "I have a cousin there who is a dressmaker; I shall get work from her, and so earn my bread."

"Bread? work? What does all that mean?" cried Bart; "why, now—now that I can see you again, look into your eyes, hear you speak, now I feel my spirit double; and if I work the fingers off my hands for it there shall be enough and to spare for us all. Come, come along!"

"For Heaven's sake don't ask me to do that, Bart! It can't be!" answered the maiden, mournfully.

He looked her in the face with eyes full at once of sorrow and surprise.

"Ah no, that can never be!" she repeated; "be sure of that, dear Bart."

A sudden change seemed to take place in the young man's feelings; again with downcast countenance he drooped his head, while calmly and sadly he replied,—

"Ah yes! my sick heart was too full of joy, and I had forgotten. To-be-sure, Cecilia, after all I am but a poor peasant lad, and you will one day be a rich young lady. I see I'm doomed to die!"

So piteous and plaintive was the tone in which

the last words were uttered that they pierced deeply and painfully into Cecilia's heart, and quite overcame the feeling of maidenly reserve which had hitherto been uppermost in it. She seized the young man's hand and pressed it, and there was a deep expression of tenderness in her voice.

"But, Bart, dear friend," she said, "you're all in a mistake. My uncle has disinherited me; he's made his will and given every thing to Thys; I shall never have a stiver in the world."

The young peasant lifted up his head and gazed on her with an air of incredulity, while a smile formed upon his lips.

"Yes, yes, dear Bart," she repeated; "I'm poor now,—as poor as yourself, every bit."

"As poor as myself!" repeated Bart in his turn, now again out of himself for joy; "as poor as my mother and sister! Heavens, what happiness! Well then, come along; let the villain keep the money; I'll make you rich, Cecilia, with a whole treasure of friendship and kind feelings and love. Come, come along!"

And again he seized her hand and sought to draw her on along with him; but still she answered sadly,—

"No, Bart, it cannot be!"

"But, for God's sake, why not?"

A crimson blush of confusion spread over her face to the very roots of her hair. With downcast eyes, she inquired,—

"Did mason Jan's widow say nothing to you yesterday afternoon?"

"Ah!" he cried; "so she spoke the truth, then? I didn't dare believe it."

"What would people say of us, Bart? You must see yourself that it can never be."

"And so, Cecilia," he replied, despondingly, "you're going off into the town, and away from us? and all perhaps to meet with new troubles, and to be cast off again there? And you'll let me die, and my poor mother go sick with grief, just for the people's idle talk's sake?"

He waited for an answer, but she neither spoke nor looked up. After a while he resumed, in a still more urgent tone:—

"Come now, Cecilia; you can sleep with my mother, and always be with her; and I will surround you with respect and love, as though you were my very guardian angel in person. And I'll work—work from early in the morning till late at night; and nothing shall be wanting to make us happy. And you shall get well again, and strong and blooming, and bring a blessing upon our house, as you did before. Oh, come, come! be a sister to my sister, and a child to my mother."

And with folded hands he seemed to beseech an answer. The maiden looked at him doubtfully.

"Oh, Cecilia," he cried, "speak! Think that there's one up there above us all who knows best whether what we do is right or wrong."

A smile full of meaning gleamed upon Cecilia's

countenance; she drew her breath heavily, like one that is struggling with some weighty resolve.

"Well, well?" asked Bart, trembling with joyful anticipation.

"Well, then," she replied, "so be it; your mother shall be my mother! I'll come home to her as if I was her own child."

A cry as sharp as if it had been the expression of severe and sudden pain burst from the young peasant's breast; he clasped his hands together over his eyes, while two gushing fountains of tears burst forth from under his fingers and trickled down his cheeks in copious streams. The maiden was at a loss to comprehend this violence of emotion, and essayed to calm him with soothing words.

"Ah!" he presently sighed out, at the same time laughing nervously through his tears, "there's pain in joy too! A strong sudden dose of it tries both heart and head sorely; but it's over now. Come, dear friend, come along!"

They now struck into another path. As for Bart, he was a totally changed man. On he walked, with head erect and looking proudly about him as he went; his cheeks glowed with quickly-circling blood; his eyes sparkled with blissful excitement; the motions of his arms and legs were of a somewhat excessive energy, as though, just awakening from a long slumber, he was shaking off from them the effects of it; ever and anon broken ejaculations of delight burst from his lips.

"Oh God! oh God!" at last he cried, "what a blessed thing life is! Look you, Cecilia, I'll work hard on the farm, and make hoops in the yard; you shall do as you did before—do a little dress-making for the neighbours; Wanna will look after the cow; mother will stay at home with you and cook for us; and whatever any of us can get, we'll put it all together and so make a savings-box. Then we'll buy another cow, and take a bit more land; and who knows? why, in time perhaps we may come so far as to hire a servant. And perhaps in time the little Chapel farm will be so happy a home, and, with God's blessing, so prosperous, that you'll never think again of that grim ugly prison yonder and all you've suffered there."

"Oh Bart, how beautifully you can talk!" murmured the maiden, in deep emotion; "it will be a heaven upon earth!"

"That's just what it must be," pursued the youth, in the same joyous strain. "And I'll plant our garden all full of the nicest flowers, with foot-paths between the beds; and I'll make bird-cages to hang up here and there and everywhere, that there may be nothing but singing and merry voices all about; and I'll learn all sorts of new songs to sing, and stories to tell, and dances to dance, and thank God on my knees every day of my life that he sent you to us. Heavens, heavens, what a life! dear Cecilia, what a life it will be! But look yonder by the draw-well: there stand my mother and Wanna."

And as he uttered these last words he left Cecilia, and started off toward the cottage like an arrow from a bow. Nevertheless, with all his haste, he found breath to keep shouting, as he ran, "Mother! Wanna!" in a voice that resounded far and wide over the fields.

His mother turned about at the sound in no little astonishment, which was greatly increased when she beheld the speed with which he came coursing on toward her. As for Wanna, his strange gestures and unintelligible cries so disconcerted her that she stood with mouth wide open looking first at Bart and then at her mother, as asking for a solution of this singular enigma.

But before Mother Ann had found time or words to express her astonishment, on came Bart, rushing, panting, and exulting, till he was close to her, and proceeded at once to explain the matter as well as his want of breath would let him.

"Mother," he cried, "dear mother! sister Wanna! I'm cured! Laugh, sing, and be merry! Here's Cecilia! yonder she comes: they've turned her out of doors; she's as poor as we are, she's disinherited, she'll come and live with us and be your child, mother. Look, look, there she is! Already she's smiling to you, the dear creature. Ah, now you sha-n't have to sit crying any more; I'm so strong, and so well, and so merry; ha, ha!

"Down with care, and away with sorrow!
Happy to-day and happy to-morrow!"

The poor mother looked upon her son with eyes beaming with unspeakable joy. At the first moment she had been in fear for his senses; but the tone of his voice speedily reassured her, and the appearance of Cecilia, who now came running up with hastened step, soon left no further room for any doubt at all

By a simultaneous movement Mother Ann and Cecilia extended their arms toward one another, the one in deep emotion, the other beaming with new-found happiness. The maiden clasped her adopted mother round the neck; the mother pressed upon her second daughter's cheek the kiss of welcome, glowing as a scintillation from the soul's inmost, holiest depth of love.

Bart looked on at the moving spectacle quivering with bliss. Tears trickled down his cheeks; he raised his eyes in prayer to Heaven, and then, as overcome by his feelings, leaned his head against the drawing-machine of the well.

As for Wanna, she danced for joy, clapping her hands exultingly, and exclaiming,—

"Oh God! oh God! it's all come right at last! What happiness!"

As soon as Bart had a little recovered himself, he approached his mother, and, as though still in fear of something, began pushing her, Cecilia, and Wanna, toward the door of the cottage.

"Come in! come in!" he cried.

They did as he said, and he was about to shut to the door; but as he was doing so he perceived

the poor widow Kate hastening up with her child along one of the footpaths; he held his hand, and, with his head out at the door, stood making urgent signs to her to hasten all she could. As she entered the forecourt, he exclaimed,—

"Quick, quick, Kate! it's all joy now! Cecilia's here! quick!"

And, hurrying her in, he closed the door.

CHAPTER VII.

SINCE Cecilia had taken up her abode at the Chapel farm, the humble cottage had become indeed a place of joy and pleasantness, even as Bart in his first burst of delight had pictured it.

Every thing there was happiness and peace. Bart worked away heartily the whole day long, and sang without ceasing at his work; the freshness and vigor of youth came back to him; a continual smile shone upon his countenance, accompanied by the rosy hue of returning health; every word that fell from his lips was full of life and spirit; he was the very living image of light-heartedness.

What gave him the most pleasure of all was the conviction that Cecilia did not regret her old home. True enough, she not unfrequently lapsed into a fit of silent sadness when she thought upon her aged uncle and pictured to herself with some alarm all that he might so easily have to endure in the solitude of the Abbey farm; but these occasional painful surmises could not weigh for much against the constant happiness which she found in the tender good-will of Bart and his mother, nor against the undisturbed serenity of her daily life. From her cheeks, too, the ashy hue of suffering

gradually disappeared; and, while habitually quiet and even reserved in manner, yet she would ever and again light up into one of those fairy smiles which can only proceed from a heart at peace within itself.

Cecilia worked at dressmaking for the neighbors, at which, being an uncommonly skilful hand, she made a very pretty bit of money, not a little to her gratification and to the encouragement of Bart and herself in their ambitious hopes and plans for the enlargement of the farm. True, the savings-box received but a few stivers a week; sometimes indeed even nothing at all, but sometimes, on the other hand, a piece of silver. Still, its contents increased; and, when Bart came into his mother's chamber and merrily shook the box which held the collected savings of their love and industry, the sound it gave was pleasant to the ear and full of promise to the heart.

The young lover had made it his especial business so to dress and decorate his mother's house as to render it a pleasant home for its beloved guest; and for this purpose had tasked to the uttermost his powers both of invention and execution. In the little garden behind the little yard he had laid out little beds, divided by little footpaths and edged in with ever-flowering thrift. Quite behind, close by the hornbeam hedge, he had put up a trellis, and over it trained a bower of honeysuckle and clematis, with a bench on either side, —one for his mother and Cecilia, the other for

Wanna and himself,—where on Sundays after service they would all come and sit together, and sing and tell pleasant tales, and rejoice in calm discourse over the sweet tranquillity of their life and God's manifold mercy and goodness.

In the garden grew all kinds of flowers; not only the well-loved lowly plants that are native to the heaths and thickets of the Kempen,* but also many of those which have been naturalized from other regions,—the last a present to Bart, from Frank, the under-gardener at the Manor-house.

Against the house itself hung several bird-cages, from which incessantly resounded the sharp, clear notes of their inmates; and pigeons, so tame that they would come and take their food out of Cecilia's hand, had their houses in the roof, and strutted with pouting breasts along the paths. At the corners of the beds were planted upright sticks, bearing on their points little mills which turned with the wind, or figures of fencers in attitude or gamekeepers taking aim, whose weapons ever pointed in the direction from which it blew: all of them matters which Bart had devised and executed for Cecilia's pleasure and out of love for her.

Wanna had her full share in the common happiness, which she entered into with the careless light-heartedness of a child, like a child too rejoicing in the felicity of the rest.

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* Or Campine, an extensive moory district in the neighborhood of Antwerp.

As for Mother Ann, she was overwhelmed with attentions and demonstrations of affection; and, as she saw her children's eyes beaming pleasure upon her at every glance, she certainly would not have changed her lot with that of the lady of the Manor. In fact, the poor little cottage of the Chapel farm was a very paradise upon earth.

Very different was the state of things at the gloomy abode from which Cecilia had been expelled, and which since her departure had been so solitary and so silent, so deathly still, that it stood there among the trees like some fated building smitten with the curse of heaven. Sometimes for two days together would the laborers who were at work in the fields about not once see the door open. The mysterious house, with its creviced walls and broken window-panes, inspired all the villagers with an uneasy fear; it was only the most courageous among them that would willingly after nightfall have taken their way through its vicinity.

And now, for the last two Sundays, Uncle Jan had not even been out to church, and Thys, when asked after him, had replied that he was confined to his bed with the gout; but, though it was very well known that he had occasionally suffered from this complaint before, yet, coming from Thys, this explanation hardly obtained universal credit. However, old Jan's miserly way of life had made him so unpopular that no one seemed to trouble himself any further about him;—no one but only

Cecilia, who had wept bitter tears at hearing of his illness.

One morning early, in the middle of the second week, Thys was sitting by the fireplace at the Abbey farm with a good fire burning on the hearth. With the help of a pair of tongs he was broiling a piece of meat upon the coals, dipping it every now and then in a plate of melted butter; in the embers on one side of the hearth stood steaming an earthen pipkin.

His piece of meat cooked, Thys set it on the table and devoured it with an intense expression of gluttonous satisfaction upon his countenance. Then he put plate and bread away in the cupboard, carefully wiped his mouth, and again took his seat beside the fire. Then, after a while, making a dip with the tongs into the boiling pot, he fetched up a quantity of green herbs, eyed them for a moment, threw them back again, and presently commenced a soliloquy:—

"A dainty-looking mess this of Uncle Jan's, and much good may it do him!—as if one's stomach was to be cheated in this silly way! I wonder what ass it was wrote the book in which he finds all these fine things! Chiccory and water-cresses to put young flesh upon old bones! I must go out and gather some water-cress, that the folks may take notice! Ah, well, I have put in a couple of handfuls of scurvy-grass too; that will purify his blood for him! Miserly upon his very death-bed! However, that's no affair of mine; I'm not here to

thwart him. If he is determined to try the experiment of living without eating, why, with all my heart, and good luck to him! I didn't think at first he could have held out so long; but he has as many lives as a cat."

Here he paused for a moment, bent his eyes fixedly upon the fire, and sank away deep into a reverie, during which his countenance gradually darkened more and more. Then again he resumed his mutterings:—

"Yes, he has as many lives as a cat. And who knows how long the lamp may flicker on yet! I'm regularly made a fool of, and after all I'm selling the skin before the fox is caught. This very morning Claes the farmer told me that the burgomaster and the rector had been asking him after uncle Jan at the vestry-meeting. And then this confounded woman that goes about everywhere abusing me and setting all the world against me! it's she and she alone that's the cause of the folks hating me so. This morning I did but step out round the corner to get some chiccory—not twenty paces from the house:—there she stood watching me from behind the coppice. I don't know, but I can't help feeling as if some mischief would come to me one day or another through that beggar-woman. If the burgomaster and the rector were to come here and want to see Uncle Jan! I've a will that leaves me every thing, that's sure enough; but that they know as well as I, and who can tell what they might say to the old man

about it?—the rector, especially, might be talking him over and putting things into his head."

This last reflection evidently threw him into a violent trepidation. For a while he sat on in silence, his head resting on his hand, then began again:—

"Cost what it may, no one must come at him! As it is, he already begins to think uneasily about what he's been doing, and is always talking about Cecilia. It wouldn't take much to make the old fool change his mind. What to do? Something I must, to stop the people's mouths: but what? It's my being here so quite alone with the old man that puts thoughts into their heads. If Cecilia was but still here they wouldn't concern themselves about what became of the old skinflint; but that would be a stupid trick:—to lock the cat into the cupboard to take care of the meat! And yet the only way to keep things smooth with the rector and the burgomaster and the rest of the busybodies is to have some one here in the house with us,—some one, it might be, under the pretence of doing odd jobs and errands, that needn't see the old man after all. Yes, so it must be; of two dangers take the least! Then, who's it to be? that's another question, again."

He bethought himself a moment, shook his head with an air of annoyance, and then relapsed into thought again, till at last a smile began slowly to steal over his countenance.

"A capital idea!" he exclaimed, "if only I can

bring it to bear! It will cost something smartish, though; for promises must be kept, say the simpletons. And then, too, there's danger in it—fair and softly; don't let's be rash, but think it well over first. Well, I should think Uncle Jan's scurvy-grass would be done by this time. Now, then, let me give this matter one more good turn in my head. A reasonable enemy is better than a stupid friend. Perhaps, after all, the beggar-woman will go into the thing more readily than I fancy. But come, I'll take the old man his mess."

He took the pot from off the fire, and, passing out at a side door and along a dark passage, reached the foot of a staircase, which he proceeded to mount. Then again came a long passage, at the end of which he at last entered the room occupied by Uncle Jan.

There lay the unhappy old man, stretched upon a bed the filthy state of which would have made a beggar turn away from it with disgust, wasted with long sickness till nothing seemed left of him but skin and bone. His cheeks were totally fallen in, so as rather to display than to mask the contour of a death's-head; his eyes were deep-sunk in their sockets, from which they glared out with a glassy brightness; his complexion had assumed that ghastly hue that could not even be called paleness, but rather the absence of all color,—a shade that has no name, and by contrast with which the blueness of his lips exhibited itself as a high-toned color.

The whole appearance of the chamber spoke of utter desertion; no human heart but must have sunk and saddened at the sight. The high overarching walls, untouched by cleansing hand since the ruin of the convent, were hidden from the eye under the thick coat of dust and dirt which had accumulated upon them. The western wall was inherently damp; the water which sweated from it trickled down upon the half-rotten floor and filtered down through that toward the lower regions of the building; while foul-looking fungi bordered the unclean stream, and crystallizations of saltpetre formed sparkling patterns upon the plaster.

A single lofty window, with broken panes and thickly barred with iron, admitted so dubious a light that the eye had to grow accustomed to it before it could readily distinguish objects in the deep gloom which confused them; while, though out of doors the ground was scorched with the summer's heat, the atmosphere of the chamber struck chilly damp upon the chest. Beside the bed stood a chair and a table; upon the latter a pot of water and a half-gnawed crust of rye-bread. In very truth, the aspect of the whole was that of a prisoner condemned by a cruel doom to the lingering death of hunger.

The poor old man seemed to be asleep; yet quite asleep he could not well be, for, as Thys came in, with a hasty snatch he hid something under the bedclothes—something which clanked and jingled

like a bunch of keys. Thys saw the movement, and heard the sound too, for an ill-omened smile crossed his countenance, and he seemed to be pricking up his ears the better to assure himself of its character. Then he drew near to the bed, set down the steaming porringer upon the table, and, in a harsh voice,—

"Come, Uncle Jan, here's your breakfast," he said.

The sick man did all he could to turn upon his side, but after a painful effort was obliged to give up the attempt, and fell heavily back into his former position.

"It's all over with me," he groaned out. "Oh, my dear Thys, I have been so ill all night!"

"Come, let me help you," replied Thys, at the same time extending his hands toward him.

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the old man, in a tone of nervous entreaty, evidently terrified at the offered help.

But Thys paid no attention, passed his hands under the patient's body, lifted him roughly, as he might have done a log of wood, and set him up in a sitting posture against the pillow.

"Oh! oh! how you do hurt me!" groaned the old man.

"What! did I hurt you?" asked Thys, in a hypocritical tone of sorrow and compassion. "I really couldn't help it! You are so easily hurt. I was obliged to lift you, as you couldn't get up yourself. But come, it's over now; eat something;

but take care and don't burn yourself; it's hot, I can tell you."

The old man took the spoon with a trembling hand, dipped it into the pot, and brought up a spoonful of the greens which it contained, saying the while,—

"Oh God, Thys, if only the herbs would do me some good! I am so weak,—so weak and ill!"

To this complaint Thys made no reply, but only fixed his eyes on the sick man more intently. Hard as the traitor tried to dissemble what was passing in his heart, he could not quite suppress the smile of glad surprise which rose upon his countenance. He rejoiced in the evident sinking of the old man's strength, and the hope that all would soon be over glistened in his eyes.

Meanwhile, Uncle Jan had eaten a spoonful or two of the greens; but soon he shook his head, let the spoon fall, and looked fixedly at Thys, as in inquiry or reproach.

"Well, what is it?" asked the latter.

"Oh, Thys," answered the sick man, in a tone of disgust, "what vile stuff it is! It burns in my mouth like fire and makes my stomach heave again!"

"I suppose now you're going to take it into your head that you're poisoned," replied Thys, jeeringly. "Of course water-cress is hot; only you're ill now, and can't bear it."

The old man stripped up his sleeve, and showing his bare arm, said, in a plaintive voice,—

"What, Thys, have you no feeling for me? See, I'm a mere skeleton!"

"Come, come, cover up your arm," was the answer; "why, what's all this about? Who is there that can pity you or feel for you more than I do? But sickness makes you silly; why, one would think you were dying."

"What! am I not ill enough, then?"

"Ill? yes; but not so ill as you fancy. There's a deal of strength left in you yet, Uncle Jan. It's your spare people that live the longest. If you get no worse, there's no harm done yet."

"I hope it may turn out so, Thys!"

Then, after a moment's pause,—

"Oh, I am so hungry!" moaned the sick man.

"Well, eat, then!" answered Thys, thrusting the crust of rye-bread into his hand.

But in vain he essayed the dry, distasteful food. Soon he began again:—

"Thys, I should like to have something else; the bread goes against me; it's like so much sand."

"Well, what will you have? There are many more kinds of herbs set down in the book that you've not tried yet."

"No; no more of them: some meat I want; —some meat soup. Oh, that must be good! it sets my mouth watering to think of it!"

An expression of annoyance and irritation flashed up for a moment upon Thys's countenance; he contained himself, however, and only replied,—

"Meat! meat soup! that would be enough to inflame your blood and kill you out of hand,—you that haven't touched any thing of the sort for so many years!"

"Ah no, Thys! do for God's sake get me some meat!"

"Very well, you're your own master. Only give me the money; and if it should be the death of you, you are my witness that I have said my say against your imprudence and gluttony."

"Money!" murmured the old man, "money! that's always the beginning and end of the song."

He drew his hands in and fumbled a while under the bedclothes, as though feeling over or counting out pieces of money. At last he put forth one hand to Thys.

"There! now get me some meat," he said.

"Ha, ha!" cried Thys contemptuously, laughing as he looked at the piece of money; "a stiver! a stiver's worth of meat!—a fine piece that will be! They won't serve you with so little as that; I must have twenty cents at the least, or I sha'n't get any."

"Heavens! twenty cents! four stivers for a little bit of meat!" murmured the old man, in a tone of despair. "However, it's only for this once; there, Thys, there are fifteen more, and if there's more than you want bring me the rest back. I dare say you'll be able to beat them down a stiver; at all events, a cent or two.

You can get bones too,—they make excellent soup, and don't cost so much."

"Of course, of course," replied Thys, impatiently; "if there's any thing over you shall have it."

He got up, and was about to leave the room; but as he was doing so the old man began again.

"Thys," he said, "there's one thing I forgot to ask you."

"What! haven't you had your say out yet?" was the reply, in a tone of evident irritation.

"Ah, don't be so sharp with me!" sighed the old man. "Look you, Thys, last night I really thought I was going to die, and the thought threw me into a cold sweat with terror. Do you know why? Oh, if I'd gone off without confession!"

"Well, what's the meaning of all this?" asked Thys, with ill-concealed anxiety.

"Thys, dear Thys," continued the sick man, imploringly, "wouldn't it be well that I should see the rector, so that I might be prepared? For who knows? God calls us away so suddenly sometimes!"

But Thys made no answer. He stood with his arms crossed on his chest, gazing in silent astonishment upon the old man, who now went on:—

"And Cecilia too; I should be glad to see her once more before I die. She has done wrong; she has behaved very ill; but for all that she's

never out of my mind day or night; and I feel as if I must tell her I forgive her before I go to meet God."

"Better and better!" cried Thys, sarcastically. "Now I do really begin to believe that you're seriously ill!—in mind though, I mean; not in body. Why, Cecilia laughs you to scorn openly; there she lives with her ninnyhammer of a lover, and makes a jest of you. I did ask her if she wouldn't come and see you, and all the answer I got was, that you'd find your way to the other world well enough without seeing her first."

The old man's head drooped upon his breast, and he wiped away a tear; Thys meanwhile went on:—

"However, do as you like; send for the rector and the doctor; set your house open to all that like to come in; only then you must make up your mind to open your purse too. It won't be with stivers that you'll come off then; every visit, every word, will cost guilders."

"Ah, well, let us wait a little, then," sighed the old man, letting himself fall back in the bed, in mingled desperation and fatigue.

"Good-by till presently, then. Only keep your spirits up; you're not so ill as you fancy."

And with these words Thys left the chamber and descended the stairs into the sitting-room below. There he stood by the fireplace for a few moments, deep in thought. Then again, thinking aloud, he went on:—

"There burst the bomb! The rector! Cecilia! meat! and to-morrow the doctor, and next day the notary! Ho, ho! he may ask for them as much as he will; that wont help him much; I have the old skinflint safe enough under my thumb now, where no one can hear him. But what if the folks outside should take it into their heads to want to see him? The rector, for instance, especially? There's only one way for it, and that is to have Kate in. But I must mind what I'm about. He mustn't die without confession; I won't have that on my conscience. And it would cast suspicion on me after his death too. But there's time enough to think about that. Ah! he'll eat meat, will he? and then come to? and then alter his testament? Let me see: to-day is Thursday; to-day I'll tell him I couldn't get any: to-morrow's Friday, and next day Saturday, both days of abstinence; and after that let's hope he'll be gone to where they don't eat meat. Let me see; now to the beggar-woman, to see what I can do with her. If I can't carry that out as I wish, why, then I must think of something else. I must confess I'm afraid of that woman, but with a little given and a great deal promised perhaps I may bring her round after all. And then I should kill two birds with one stone:—be rid of her machinations and stop the people's prating both at once. And if only she'll go into the thing in earnest, and really stand by me, why, then, I shall have a sentinel

to keep guard when I'm out of the way. Well, we shall see now which is the more cunning of the two."

And, thus concluding, he left the house, but not without taking care to lock the door on the outside.

"Now, if Uncle Jan would but make an end of it while I'm out," he muttered, "why, then all would be straight; but he'll hardly be so obliging as that. However, who knows? nothing is impossible."

And, thus soliloquizing, he was proceeding on his way to the village, when suddenly he perceived Cecilia at some distance off, but advancing along the same path in the opposite direction. For a moment he turned pale, but almost instantly recovered himself; while she did not notice his approach till they were close upon one another. Then first perceiving him, she came directly up to him and spoke.

"Oh, Thys, I am so glad to see you at last! Be so good as to tell me, really and plainly, how is my uncle?"

Her unassuming and friendly tone set Thys quite at rest as to her intentions; he answered, therefore, civilly enough,—

"Well, Cecilia, he's getting on pretty well. He has a fit of the gout: it's the rich man's complaint, you know; but no one dies of it, and no doubt he'll get over it too; for the present, though, he's confined to his room."

"And does he suffer much pain?"

"So so—so so. Not very much, considering."

Cecilia's eyes were moist with tears.

"But, Thys," she went on, "you'll take good care of him; won't you, now? You won't let him want for any thing that can help or comfort him?"

"What should he want for? he's quite content," was the reply.

There was something in her eyes, as she looked at him, so gentle and deprecatory, that he for his part stood all in a maze; he even seemed to fancy that it was expressive of a change in her sentiments toward him, and accordingly proceeded:—

"Ah, Cecilia, if you'd have done as I wished, you'd been a lady one of these days. Now it's too late; I'm to have all myself. That comes of obstinacy!"

"Thys," the maiden began again, with the same expression of gentleness and supplication upon her countenance, "may I ask a favor of you?"

"Why not?"

"But will you grant it me, Thys? I shall be so thankful to you!"

"Let me hear what it is."

"It does grieve me so, Thys, not once to be able to go to see my poor uncle, and he so ill. You know how I love him. Do let me see him,

for God's sake, Thys, and I'll remember you in my prayers."

The hypocrite shrugged his shoulders, and replied,—

"I've thought of that myself; and if it depended on me, Cecilia, the day shouldn't go by without your seeing him."

"Look you, Thys, you needn't be afraid of me; you're quite welcome to all the money for me; I don't care about it. There's something better than money to be happy with here upon earth."

Then, folding her hands, and more and more imploringly:—

"Thys, dear Thys, do let me see him just for a moment! it might perhaps be some comfort to him, now that he's so ill."

"You deceive yourself," he answered. "I have asked him myself, I suppose more than twenty times, whether I should ask you to come to see him; but I've never been able to bring him to say yes. He's so irritated against you that he can't hear your name without flying out; and that's not good for the gout, you know."

The poor girl put her apron to her eyes and wept bitterly.

"Oh God," she exclaimed, through her sobs, "what have I done to him, then?—to him that I have never ceased to love as my father, that I'm always thinking about, always dreaming about? And he's set against me! hates me!

Since I left his house I've never shed a tear but what was on his account! If he only knew how I love him, he couldn't cast me off so cruelly!"

"Yes indeed, Cecilia," responded Thys; "one would think so, and I've not a word to say against it; but old people have strange fancies. However, don't be out of heart; I'll try and bring him round yet. I have done something already; he's not so bitter against you by a good deal as he was. I know him; and I don't doubt but in a few days I can get him into another way of thinking; and then I'll let you know."

"Do so, then, dear Thys; be so kind. I'll be grateful to you my life long."

"Well, Cecilia, now I must be going; but be of good hope."

"And if meanwhile he should become really dangerously ill, Thys?"

"Oh, then I'll come and fetch you whether he will or not."

"Thanks, thanks, my friend!" cried the maiden heartily, while Thys left her and went on his way

"It's strange," he began, again soliloquizing, as he stepped along in the path; "I do believe now she doesn't care whether she gets the old man's money or not. She's fool enough for that. Other means of happiness! Love, I suppose! I'm curious to know how long that will last. A bird with no seed in his trough has soon done singing! So she wants to see her uncle, does

she? we'll take pretty good care that that doesn't come to pass."

"And so, casting in his mind this and many other matters, he walked on, striking off in due time into another path, which at last brought him on in front of a poor cottage on the edge of a coppice.

"Now, then, sharp's the word! here lives mason Jan's widow. We mustn't be in too much of a hurry to let out what we're after. She must be at home, for there I see her child routing in the sand before her door."

With loitering step he approached the poor mud-built dwelling. The child did not hear him coming till he was close upon her and spoke to her.

"Good-morning, dear Mieken; where's your mother?"

But, as though the voice of an evil spirit had struck her ear, the little girl sprang convulsively to her feet, and, with a terrified look at Thys, dashed off into the neighboring thicket, and thence away over the fields, screaming lustily as she ran.

"I don't seem to be exactly in first-rate favor here," he muttered; "if the mother receives me as graciously as the child, I shall hardly take much by my visit."

He entered the cottage as he spoke, and scanned all in it with a contemptuous smile.

"She's not living on the fat of the land, though,

the good woman; why, all that's in her place put together wouldn't fetch ten stivers! I begin to think we may come to terms; a little money must carry all before it in such a den as this. I'll sit down and wait a bit; most likely the child is off to her mother."

And in this surmise he was not mistaken; the little girl had made the best of her way to a field where her mother was at work, and, still trembling with affright, had told her how Thys had called at their cottage.

For the first moment this news struck her, as they say, all of a heap with astonishment. What could the villanous impostor have to do with her? And for some little time she stood with her eyes bent upon the ground, seeking an answer to this question. Gradually, however, her features relaxed into a smile,—a smile expressive at once of sly insight and of a certain sort of satisfaction. She gave her child in charge to some other women who were working in the field, and proceeded homeward, still thinking over what this might mean as she went.

"Thys come to look for me? What ever can that be for? Something must have happened; or there's something more than usual in the wind. I know he fears me; he can't see me without starting. Good-will to me it isn't that brings him; there's a snake in the grass somewhere. So, wide awake, Kate! he's a cunning fellow, and might very well take you in, one way or the other. But

I'll keep my wits about me, and see what it is he has in his sleeve."

Thus cogitating, she had arrived at her home; and now, entering and immediately addressing herself to Thys,—

"Well," she commenced, "you here, of all people in the world! I had never thought to see you under my poor roof! But, since you are here, what is there I can do for you?"

"Take a seat, Kate," answered Thys, already half-disconcerted by the widow's entire self-possession; "I've something serious to talk to you about."

And thereupon she did so, adding, as she sat down,—

"I've not much time to spare; so, make haste; I'm listening."

"Look you, Kate, I know that you're sadly poor; believe me, I'm sorry for you; if I could do any thing to help you up a little, it would be a real pleasure to me."

"Why, how now!" exclaimed the widow, with a laugh; "and it was all out of pity, I suppose, that last winter you pushed down my poor Mieken and drove me out of the house like a strange cur?"

"You must forget that, Kate. Times change, and people with them. I've been sorry since I was so hard with you, and have meant to make it good if I had the opportunity. Well, I think I can do you a good turn now, if you won't refuse one from me."

She eyed him distrustfully, and made no answer, although he was evidently waiting for one from her; not getting one, however, he proceeded:—

"Now, if I could send a bit of money your way, —enough to set you and yours above want,—would you thank me for it, Kate?"

"Is it alms you're offering me?" asked the widow.

"No; something better than that. You know, I suppose, Kate, that Uncle Jan has made a will to leave every thing to me. Now you, on account of your late husband, have a claim upon some small share in what he'll leave; at least so you think. And that's why—because you felt that you were in the way to get nothing—that's why you've always been so set against me. Well now, to show you how well and fairly I mean by you, I've come to tell you that I mean to give you this share myself."

The widow listened, all astonished at what she heard.

"Yes," pursued Thys; "whoever gets the money, I or another, you'd have been none the better for it; for your right's doubtful, and at best could only be made good at a great outlay. However, as you're the only one of the family that is really in poverty, and to show you that I've the heart of an honest man, I've come now to tell you that you shall have the share that you think you have a right to without trouble or dispute. Now, what say you?"

"Indeed, you're very kind!" answered the widow. "But are you in earnest? Do you really mean what you say?"

"Why should I come and make you the offer? Well, now, Kate, do you accept it?"

"Indeed I do, Thys, and thankfully too; but I only wish to know whether there are any conditions on my part; for, do you see, Thys, something for nothing isn't much in your way, or you must be very much changed of late."

"No; it's a free gift, without any condition whatever," Thys replied.

"Then I accept gladly. But, to say the truth, your generosity seems so surprising to me that I still can't quite believe but that you're making jest of me."

"Why so?"

"And when shall I get the money, Thys?"

"You'll get yours when I get mine."

"But what security have I that you'll keep your promise?"

"My word as an honest man."

"Well, it's possible that may be good for something now, as you say you've so totally changed; so I accept it for what it's worth, and I thank you. Now I must go back to my work."

She rose from her seat to return to the field, but with a smile upon her countenance which sufficiently testified that of all Thys had been saying to her not one word did she believe.

"Wait a moment," he now said, "and I'll con-

vince you that I'm in earnest with you. You know, Kate—or perhaps you don't know—that the old man is ill; he has the gout, and can't leave his room. His illness throws a great deal upon me, and there are errands out of doors, and this and that to be cooked,—and in fact there's more than I can well do all by myself; and so he's asked me to look out for some woman that might be up at the Abbey farm in the daytime, and help me. She'll get something decent a day and her good meals."

Since Thys had opened upon this branch of his errand the widow had begun to scan him with close attention and heightened curiosity; she seemed to seek some occult meaning in every word that came out of his mouth, suppressing, however, as much as possible, any signs of emotion.

"And so I came down to you, Kate," he continued, "to see whether you'd be willing to undertake the job. You'll go home every evening and come up to our place in the morning. It won't be hard work, and you shall have as much as you would get for your day's work in the fields and your keep besides. That's not a bad offer, I think; is it?"

"Far from it; it's the best of the whole matter. As for the rest, why, you know yourself, Thys, it's ill reckoning your chickens before they're hatched; and, after all, things may go cross, and you may never come into the old man's money yourself;

but the day's wages for the day's work, that's sure money."

"So then you accept?"

"To-be-sure, to-be-sure, Thys; do you think I'm fool enough to refuse?"

"But then your children, Kate? I never thought of them."

"Oh, my children? Two of them are with my sister, some three hours' walk from here; and Mieken looks after the cows for Farmer Claes; she'll be well taken care of there in the daytime, and at night I shall be at home myself, you know."

"That's all right, then," said Thys, well pleased; "and so now our bargain's struck. Come, Kate, your hand upon it, in witness that we mean fairly by one another. There, now it's settled. When shall I expect you, then? The sooner the better, as far as I'm concerned; this afternoon can you come?"

"Oh, I can come directly," answered the widow, "I've only to step down to speak to Farmer Claes and his good dame about Mieken and the work."

Thys now rose from his seat, and made as though in the very act of leaving, but stood still for a moment, and, with as good an air of indifference as he could put on,—

"By-the-way, Kate," he remarked, "you just said I might perhaps never come into the old man's money after all; of course you know if I get nothing I can give nothing."

"That's of course," answered the widow; "but

never fear; it won't slip through your fingers now."

"So much the better for both of us, Kate, if it doesn't; but one can never be too cautious. It's true Cecilia's quite willing I should have her share. Only this morning I was wishing to encourage her to hope for the best, and she obstinately persisted that she desired neither part nor lot in her uncle's property. But there are others who have no right at all, and who, to have a pretence for forcing their way into the house, give out that the old man is at the point of death. So you must tell everybody the real truth; and that is, that Uncle Jan has the gout, neither more nor less. You will, won't you?"

"I'll say and do just whatever you tell me," answered the widow

"Look you, Kate; if we can once set the good people at rest about that,—as in truth they may well be,—then we sha'n't have so many of them meddling in our matters."

"Leave me alone for that, Thys; you know well enough, I think, that my tongue isn't stiff in the hinges."

"Only one thing more, Kate. I must tell you beforehand, else it might seem strange to you. The old man will have nobody to come near him but me; you'll see nothing of him till he comes down again."

"There's nothing strange to me in that; he was always that way before he was ill."

"And mind, you must never let any one in while I'm out; you'll mind that, won't you? And you'll keep the door fast locked and bolted, they may knock as they like?"

"I'll do all you tell me. More I can't say."

"So do, then. For, just see: if you don't pull with me like a true friend and a reasonable woman, why, then I shall be obliged to look out for some one else, and all is at an end between us."

"You may go home quite at your ease, Thys, and of good cheer," said the widow, now rising also; "you shall be satisfied with me, if ever you are to be with any one."

"Good-day, then, till the afternoon, or earlier, if you can. And here's a handsel for you; you see I'm not miserly with you."

He put a two-franc piece into her hand, left the cottage, and soon disappeared behind the thicket. For some moments the widow followed him with her eyes, then, with a scornful smile:—

"Ha, ha! the false devil! He thinks that I've sold my soul to him! sold it for mere idle words! But I should like to know what he's about up there to want an accomplice for! So that's it, is it? I'm to help him to cheat and plunder that angel-good Cecilia of her inheritance! What does the hypocritical Judas take me for? But now I have him safe, the knave! It must have been the justice of God that put that thought

into his head. I was just the right one for him to happen upon!"

A short pause of reflection ensued, during which the bitter smile passed away from her countenance and gave place to a gentle expression. With joy beaming from her eyes she recommenced:—

"To recover for Cecilia her uncle's love and her rightful inheritance; to repay her and Bart, my kind benefactors, for all their goodness; to punish the hypocrite, to oppose and overcome the evil-doer;—ah, that will be glorious! And therefore—and therefore I pray God to grant the poor widow understanding, that she may defeat the schemes of this bad man!"

She left her cottage and struck into a path across the fields. And now, for the first time, she remembered the piece of money that Thys had put into her hand. For a moment she eyed it with a bitter laugh, then cast it far away over the trees, and hastily rubbed her hand upon her apron, as though to cleanse it from a stain the coin had left upon it.

CHAPTER VIII.

The widow had now passed three days at the Abbey farm. Nothing of what she saw there was of a nature to confirm her worst suspicions; on the contrary, she began to believe that she had, to some extent, done Thys wrong. He showed so much care for the old man, and spoke so compassionately of his benefactor, that she was forced to doubt whether, after all, there might not lie something of good deep down at the bottom of his heart. That the old man, moreover, was in any immediate danger she could not believe either; for twice a day Thys had a good meal of meat and potatoes dressed for him, and, if he could bear such solid living as that, he could hardly but be in some sense strong and in good case.

But here Kate was taken in. If she had followed the hypocritical villain into the dark passage, when he, as he said, carried up the patient's meals, she would have seen that it was not to the old man's chamber, but to his own, that he carried the strengthening fare. Poor Uncle Jan got nothing but poor food that his stomach revolted against; such that he even gnawed on by prefer-

ence at his hard, dry rye-bread crust, little suited as that, too, was to do him any good.

The sick man did, indeed, with increasing impatience, even at times with considerable irritation, begin to press for better nourishment, feeling himself to be in fact dying with hunger; but all that he could say upon this head was totally ineffectual,—Thys at one time talking him over with plausible words, at another simply turning a deaf ear to his entreaties, until the poor old man held his peace from mere exhaustion and weariness.

This third evening, just as Kate was about to leave the Abbey farm for the night, Thys had asked her to come back after having made her arrangements at home, under pretext that Uncle Jan wished for a warm bath, and that a great quantity of hot water would be wanted for that purpose. Accordingly, as soon as she had put Mieken to bed she returned. Now, however, she was told that the old man had changed his mind about the bath; but that nevertheless it would be well she should stay, for that fever had come on, and it was very possible the doctor might have to be fetched in the course of the night; perhaps even — only, however, in order to run no risk — the priest too. Not, Thys said, that Uncle Jan seemed materially worse than he had been, but he was an old man, wellnigh worn out, and without much power of rallying left in him. It would

be most prudent, therefore, to have some one at hand in case of need; contrary to all expectation, his case might suddenly become serious.

All this dust thrown in the widow's eyes had not, however, entirely blinded her. Her conclusion was that the old man's illness was in truth much more serious than she had been made to believe; and she determined that, if the night did not bring her some satisfaction on this head, she would in the morning at once break with Thys and bring the rector and the burgomaster about his ears, and so, with the aid of the spiritual and temporal authorities, arrive at a solution of this mystery of iniquity.

She was sitting alone by the fireplace, meditating on the best way of bringing the matter before the authorities, so that they should plainly see their way in the unrighteous plot that was being played off at the Abbey farm for depriving Cecilia of her lawful inheritance. Perhaps the rector would not refuse making an attempt to bring back the old man to a sense of justice; and in that way she might be able to effect that for her benefactors which, while she remained in the house, would be totally beyond her reach, seeing that up to this time she had never once succeeded in obtaining sight of the sick man.

But in the midst of her deliberations the fear crossed her mind that next morning might perhaps be too late; for who could tell what might be going on up-stairs between Thys and the old

man? This doubt threw her into a fever-fit of restlessness and anxiety. From time to time she rose from her seat, and, stepping on tiptoe into the passage which led toward Uncle Jan's chamber, with noiseless tread she approached the foot of the staircase; but, after listening there for some time with all her ears, she heard nothing, every thing up-stairs remaining in perfect quiet; she presently, therefore, returned to the sitting-room, and continued her meditations by the fireside.

And now the note of midnight is sounding from the tower of the village church. One by one, sadly and solemnly, the strokes reverberate through space; one by one they die away upon the ear, till the deepest stillness of the season again prevails. In Uncle Jan's chamber burns a small metal lamp, dimly flickering, with dense smoke and lurid flame. Dismal, unearthly even, is the scene; the imperfect light leaves the corners all in gloom; the very walls are not distinctly visible. The room has thus the effect of a mere portion of space — of space endless and boundless as eternity.

Only a part of the bed and of the table which stands by it receives the blood-red illumination of the lamp. The old man is lying on his side, with his face toward the table; he seems to sleep; nevertheless, from time to time he mechanically opens his eyes, but only just as mechanically to shut them again immediately.

His countenance is ghastly; the skull, apparent in all its angularity, is covered only with a thin transparent skin, stretched, as it were, over the bones; his eyes are glassy and lifeless, his lips colorless. Only from the red flame of the lamp flickers across his face a tinge of lurid color, such as the last rays of this earth's light might shed over the ashy cheeks of a corpse already laid out for the grave.

By the table sits Thys, who, intending to watch beside the sick man, has fallen fast asleep, with his head against the back of the chair.

His ill-favored features, too, are in the light. Even now, when relaxed in sleep, his visage tells plainly of the evil soul within; and his great mouth bears permanently impressed upon it a malicious smile. Ever and anon his lips contract or his brow creases; nervous twitchings, more than sufficiently expressive of ill-feeling and annoyance, flit across his countenance. He is evidently dreaming.

The aged sufferer has again opened his eyes, and now notices the significant play of feature which so unfavorably betrays the hidden workings of the sleeper's mind. With mingled terror and aversion he keeps his eyes fixed upon the ill-omened spectacle, and consciousness and reflection awaken in him as he contemplates it.

He casts his eyes around the gloomy chamber, then upon the lamp, with its faint, dim light flickering through the darkness like the marsh-lights which mislead the traveller on his

way, then back upon Thys, whose face he again fixedly contemplates with inexpressible terror, and who now, still in sleep, grinds his teeth, and draws back his lips like a dog about to bite; while the whole expression of his countenance is so cruel, so murderous, that the sick old man shudders and shuts his eyes, till again impelled to open them by a new incident.

From the sleeper's lips sounds begin to be heard; he seems to be speaking. Now the expression of his features is totally changed; all trace of annoyance has disappeared; he smiles, and seems elated. He is in fact speaking, while his eyes are still closed in sleep; not all, however, is articulate, and sometimes his voice sinks and his lips move in dumb show merely. Such broken sentences as these drop from them:—

"A cellar—a hundred thousand guilders—the old skinflint—I'll give you plenty, plenty! By to-morrow he's dead!—Meat, indeed!—no, not for him! water, bread,—he won't die,—a little starving will help him.—I have his will;—patience, he's going now; that's his last sigh; he's dying!—Ha, ha! all his money's mine!"

But here a terrible cry burst from the old man's breast; and immediately Thys started from his sleep, sprang convulsively to his feet, rubbed his eyes, and stared with astonishment at Uncle Jan, who was shouting for help with all his might and making the room re-echo with his cries.

Thys's first care was to assure himself that he

had nothing to fear from without; and, this once ascertained, he had little difficulty in divining the cause of the old man's terror; the less so, as from the nervous excitement in which he felt himself he could well imagine he had been talking in his sleep. As for Uncle Jan's cries, Thys let him go on with them, till in a few moments mere exhaustion brought them to a pause; regarding him intently the while, with arms folded on his chest and a savage smile upon his lips.

"Well, Uncle Jan, have you done yet?" at last he said; "make as much noise as you like, pray; scream and cry out as you will; no one will hear you."

But the old man, whose terror was increased by the expression of Thys's countenance, recommenced his cries for help with desperate energy. It seemed as though the fear of death had given him new strength; his movements now showed something of vigor, and his voice was clear and far-reaching.

"Be still!" cried Thys, holding his clenched fist menacingly in the old man's face; "be still, or I'll soon stop your mouth for you!"

Uncle Jan ceased his cries, and Thys withdrew his fist.

"Let me just hear you again!" he said, savagely.

The old man was now silent, from want of breath perhaps as much as from fear, for his chest heaved violently; but all the while he kept his eyes fixed on Thys with an expression of intense abhorrence.

"Well," presently resumed the latter, jeeringly,

"am I to know at last what wasp it is that has stung you? I suppose I've been dreaming? Are you out of your wits, to make such a to-do about it? You'd better be trying to get to sleep: that would do you more good than all these foolish pranks."

At these words the old man's indignation broke forth anew.

"You serpent!" he exclaimed. "Ah, you mean me to die of hunger up here, like a dog, do you? I live too long for you? Bread and water are to finish me, bit by bit? you'll starve me? you want my money, and so I must die, murderer?"

Thys scanned the furious old man all in astonishment, not unmingled with affright, for now he saw that his iniquities lay open in their full atrocity. Uncle Jan went on:—

"But you sha'n't get it! You thought there would be an end of me this night! no, no! God will give me life and strength to punish you, you villain! In the morning, this very morning, I'll make a new will; and you shall have nothing, you! nothing but my curse! Yes, in the morning I'll send for Cecilia, and the notary, and witnesses; yes, and the gendarmes, too, to take you to prison. I'll complain against you, and have you punished, I will. Ah, you thought I was dying! you shall see!"

"Ha, ha!" answered Thys, with a sarcastic laugh; "who will hear you, pray?"

"It will be daylight presently, and I'll call and

cry out loud enough and long enough, that some one shall hear me."

A long pause ensued, while Thys, without uttering a syllable, bent his eyes steadfastly upon those of the old man, whose last words seemed to make a most earnest impression upon him. At first his countenance was serious, as of one in deep reflection; but gradually the ill-boding smile again contracted his lips, and he came closer up to the bed. He pushed the table on one side, stood hard by the bed's head with his arms crossed, and, in a scornful tone,—

"I can't help laughing at your absurdity!" he began. "Do you think that I've been your slave for ten years—have fawned upon you like a dog for ten years—for love of you? do you think that I've been living these ten years on dirt and swine's husks for my own pleasure? do you think that I've been dragging out the ten best years of my life in this dismal dog-hole because I'd no taste for enjoying life? do you think that I've been making a hypocrite, a cheat, a scoundrel—or any thing else you like to call it—of myself, all for nothing, and without the hope of being in some way repaid for it? Why, you must think me simpler and more stupid than a baby! No, no! I've sacrified for you my own will and way, all my inclinations, my honesty, my life, my very soul; and now you must pay me for it!—pay me in hard cash!"

"Not a stiver!" murmured the old man, passionately.

"Not a stiver!" repeated the other; "that's easy enough for you to say; but are you quite out of your senses? have you no fear of what you may provoke me to? You forget that I have you as completely at my mercy here as if we were alone together in a desert, and that there's no one to see what means I take of enforcing payment. You call me villain and murderer; but you can't believe your own words, that you thus irritate the lion that can devour you—yes, devour you, if you don't satisfy his hunger! and I hunger after your money, Uncle Jan; so satisfy me—satisfy me, or——"

And as he uttered these last words his eyes flashed so ferociously upon his victim that the old man fell back upon the bed with a shriek of terror.

"Satisfy me! satisfy me!" Thys went on, now quite beside himself, and grinding his clenched teeth together with all the air of murderous resolve.

"Oh, my God, help!" cried the sick man, extending his trembling hands. "Thys, Thys, what is it you want?"

"Your keys I want!" thundered Thys; "your keys!"

The old man made no answer to this demand; but it seemed to inspire him with greater terror than all the threats that had gone before it. With feverish haste he drew both hands under the bedclothes; every limb seemed on the stretch, as though in position for resisting an attack.

"Ha, ha!" cried Thys, "I know well enough you'll give me your soul sooner than your keys; but I must and will have them; yes, if I have to wrench your hand from your body with them! Come, give them me! give them me!"

And he threw himself upon the sick old man, thrust his hand under the bedclothes, and proceeded to search there for the keys. But, do what he would,—snatch, pull, wrest, strike,—yes, do what he would,—the old man's hands clutched the keys with so desperate a grasp that in very truth it would have been easier to wrench the arms from his body than the object of the struggle out of his fingers.

Baffled and weary, Thys let go his hold of the keys, and for the moment desisted from his attack, and at this moment it was perhaps that a thought of deeper horror first distinctly entered his mind. Again he stood beside the bed, and with heaving chest looked fixedly upon the old man, who still kept his keys hidden away beneath the bedclothes.

And presently his countenance gradually assumed a new and indescribable expression,—an expression at once so extravagant and so devilish that the habitual brutality and malice of his physiognomy sank back into tameness by contrast with its present outbreak of delirious ferocity. The muscles of his cheeks worked spasmodically; his teeth ground audibly together; a livid paleness overspread his visage; his hair bristled like a

hyena's mane. In a voice hoarse with passion he exclaimed,—

"Ha, you won't pay me, won't you? If you won't alive, you shall dead, then; so here's for you,"

He sprang like a wild beast upon the bed, and, bending down over the sick man, with both elbows forcefully compressed his chest. A rattling sound of frighful import issued from the victim's throat, a sharp convulsion ran through all his limbs, which presently relaxed, and then all was still. Thys seized the bunch of keys, and with a single pluck broke the string by which they were fastened round Uncle Jan's neck; then he slowly came down from the bed.

And now there he stood, leaning with one hand upon the table, quivering with agitation and fatigue, and with the terror of the thought that the noise of the struggle might have been audible below. His eyes were fixed upon the lifeless body; a cold sweat trickled down his forehead and his cheeks. Perhaps he repented him of what he had done, perhaps he trembled for the consequences. Whichever it might be, he stood for a considerable time as though struck with utter helplessness. At last, with a hideous groan, he mechanically took up the lamp, approached the door of the room, and opened it.

A cry of terror burst from his lips. Before him stood the widow, with a look of interrogation upon her countenance! Perhaps from behind

the door, through the keyhole, she had heard, had seen, all that had passed!

Fiercely he glared upon her, while she seemed totally at a loss to account for his disturbed air; he even raised his hand as though to brain her with the bunch of keys.

"What do you want here?" he howled.

"I thought I heard you call me," she answered, retreating, and evidently preparing for flight; "or was it Uncle Jan that called? Well, well, there's no need to be so angry; I can go as I came."

Thys let fall his hand with the keys, at the same time stammering out,—

"Uncle Jan has had a stroke; I believe he's dead. Go to him—no, go down and fasten all the doors—but first see if he is dead, though—get some vinegar."

In his confusion he no longer knew what he was saying, so violent a revulsion in his whole nervous system had ensued upon his ruthless deed. With wavering steps he now approached a massive door, found, after some search, the right key, and passed into a long dark corridor which ran along the whole length of the building, from one end to the other. The lamp threw its light on but a small portion of the walls, and surrounded him with a dim sphere of illumination, without effectually dispelling the darkness.

On he went, stumbling and feeling his way through these unknown localities. Already were his terrors and his conscience holding up to his

troubled imagination the righteous judgment of God upon his deed. How much greater would those terrors have been could he have seen the human shadow which crept after him from afar in the deep gloom of the corridor!

Probably indeed he may have heard some suspicious sounds behind him, for he stopped and looked back. Eventually, however, he proceeded on his way, till again stopped by another door of singular construction. The portal was low and arched; the door itself so thickly set with iron plates and bestudded with huge nails that barely was the wood visible beneath them. Several padlocks of unusual size, red with rust, hung from it; a bar, or rather massive beam, of iron, added a last security to the miser's treasury.

With throbbing heart, and not without much labor and pains, Thys opened the locks and removed all obstacles. He descended a flight of steps, and found himself in an extensive cellar. And now, at last, arrived at the hiding-place of the old man's hoards, the evil-doer thought no more of his evil deed; his conscience held its peace; his fears entirely left him. The only feeling for which his heart now had room was the burning desire after the sight of gold, the touch of gold, the possession of gold. On his countenance beamed a smile of transport; in his eyes glowed the fire of passionate longing.

With the lamp in his hand, he walked round the cellar, searching as he went; but, to his no

little consternation, nothing could he discern but the four bare walls, and, near the foot of the steps, a large stone, which had evidently served for a seat. He began to quake in all his limbs; his countenance fell with anxiety and vexation.

"What!" he dejectedly murmured; "can it be that the gold is not here? And yet there's no other way out. Impossible! Ah, what do I see there in the wall? isn't that a keyhole?"

Laughing aloud, and beside himself for joy, he hurried up to the point in the wall which had attracted his attention, audibly venting his elation as he sought out the right key, and at last opened a hidden cavity in the wall.

"Ha, ha! here lies the treasure! See! see, three bags! four—five bags! Gold! gold!"

With trembling hands and inward exultation he took one of the linen bags out of its hiding-place, and was about to undo the string with which it was fastened; but all at once he started with a sudden fright; the bag fell from his hand. He turned toward the entrance of the vault, and listened with trembling anxiety; it seemed to him as though he had heard a noise in that direction,—a noise as of the creaking of iron.

For a few moments he stood motionless and nervously listening; not the slightest sound could he catch. Gradually he recovered from his fright; he took the bag up again from the ground, observing, as he did so,—

"Ah, it is nothing! the bolt of the lock, I sup-

pose, that hadn't quite shut at first. So, now for it!"

And he opened the bag and hastily clutched at its contents. But how was the expression of his countenance changed! what dismay at once and contempt did it tell of, when his eyes fell upon the handful of pieces which his eager grasp brought out!

"Copper!" he muttered; "copper!" and he let the bag fall, to seize another.

"Copper! nothing but copper!" he again exclaimed, with growing agitation.

And each time that he opened a fresh bag it was ever and again the mortifying word "copper!" that fell from his lips.

As he proceeded in this agitating search, his cheeks grew pale; the sweat of anguish burst forth upon his brow; his chest heaved violently, laboring for breath. At last he took up the last bag; his legs trembling under him with unstrung joints, he undid the last string. Again the agonizing cry "Copper! copper!" burst from his struggling breast.

While with his left hand he convulsively griped and wrung the fatal bag which had so inexorably put to naught his last hope of a golden booty, his right was with feverish haste travelling round the interior of the receptacle and closely investigating its sides in the hope of some further discovery. But it was empty; no trace of any thing more did the anxious fingers meet. Not yet satisfied,

he placed the lamp within the hollow, and painfully scanned it on every side with the narrowest scrutiny. But all in vain; nothing could he see; —nothing but the plain well-joined stone of the wall.

A dismal groan gurgled up through his throat. With unsteady steps he approached the great stone. Utterly unnerved, he sat down upon it, and set the lamp beside him on the floor. There for some time he sat, with his head leaned upon his hand and his eyes bent with glassy stare upon the vacant gloom around. Then, in a tone of mingled dismay and rage, he broke out,—

"A few pounds of copper! And so that's to be the price of my ten years' slavery and misery! And the price, too, of a murder!—of my immortal soul! Oh, that Uncle Jan! the villain! the hypocrite! the thief! Yes, he has cheated me!—robbed me! And so that's what my long-expected fortune is come to!—my wealth, my life of pleasure, my rise in the world!—a heap of coppers! And, curse upon it, for that I've murdered him! But didn't he deserve it? Murdered him, indeed! why, I ought to have torn him to shreds!—and slowly, too! I should have tortured him! the false villain!"

He ceased to speak. Quivering with agitation, he fixed his eyes upon the ground. Soon tears began to overflow from his eyes; the cowardly villain wept and sobbed like a child. However, it was not for long that this fit of depression had

the mastery over him. With a horrible curse he sprang from his seat, seized the bag which lay at his feet, and, howling inarticulately in delirious fury, dashed it, heavy as it was, to the farthermost corner of the vault. As the mass of coin struck the ground, a hollow sound was returned.

"Ha!" cried Thys, with joyful surprise, "ha! what is that?"

Beside himself with renewed hope, he hastily sprang forward, the lamp in his hand, and threw himself on his knees upon the floor of the cellar, rapping hither and thither with his knuckles, and nodding with his head in glad response to the hollow sounds he elicited. In a few moments he had opened a little trap, which disclosed an excavation in the floor, and in it a number of linen bags evidently full of coin. With a sort of sensual delight he gloated upon the treasure.

"The silly cheat!" he muttered, as he took out one of the bags; "so he'd set a trap? and baited it too? hidden some copper where it couldn't but be found? But his device hasn't had much success; here must be the stuff."

Then, "Gold! Ah! that is gold!" he suddenly exclaimed, in a voice strangely resembling a child's cry of exultation; "gold! And this next? what will that be? Ah, gold! again gold! And the third? Gold! nothing but gold!"

One after another he thus extracted and opened all the bags, till the cavity was entirely empty;

then, somewhat retreating, he sat down upon the ground, and, forgetful of all beside, began to shake out the contents of the bags into one great heap before him. For some time he kept his eyes undeviatingly bent upon the golden store, with a radiant expression upon his countenance, as had heaven and all its glories suddenly stood open to his view; an expression, in fact, of transcendental felicity, narrowly trenching upon the idiotic.

"Ha, ha!" he muttered; "that looks well! How it glances! it's downright alive with splendor and with glory! And so much of it! But it's the price of my soul! Well, and a good price for it, too! more than it's fairly worth! Ha, ha! now for life and jollity and enjoyment! now for being master and having servants, for eating and drinking and riding in my carriage! now for power and obsequious friends, and for crushing into the dust whatever won't bow down before me! All that lies here in this gold,—this glittering mass of soulless metal. Oh, let me touch it, feel it, possess it!"

And, quite beside himself, he began to rout with his fingers in the gold, while incoherent exclamations of delight fell from his lips; and then he began to count over the money again and again, apparently without any precise purpose or consciousness.

Entranced in this occupation, or rather play, and in entire forgetfulness of all else, he spent a

considerable time, till aroused from it by a sensible waning of the light from the lamp. Then suddenly his countenance resumed a serious expression; he cast his eyes anxiously around, stood up, and rubbed his forehead as seeking to collect his scattered thoughts, muttering the while,—

"But what was it I came here for? Have I lost my senses? Ah, yes! quick! I must hide the gold in some other place, where no one but myself can find it. But I must make haste; the light's going out."

He filled two of the largest bags with gold, took up one under each arm, and thus, loaded almost to sinking, mounted the steps. At the door he set down his burden and proceeded to unlock the door. But, though the key turned readily enough and the bolt of the lock shot back, the door refused to open, even when he put forth all his force against it: immovable it remained, like a piece of the wall itself.

Thys began to tremble, and an icy thrill ran through all his limbs. Still he could not, he would not, believe his fear, and went on making violent efforts to open the door. He forced the key backward in the lock; he set his back against the door and essayed with all his might to force it from its hinges. He strove and struggled till the sweat trickled from his brow. But all in vain; nothing even gave him the shadow of a hope. At last, wearied and exhausted, he stood

as annihilated before the door, and his head drooping in despair upon his chest.

"Frightful!" he exclaimed; "fastened on the outside! But no; that cannot be; I must be mistaken; who should have done it? Kate? But there's the share she's looking for from me. Heavens, the light's going! the lamp's out! quick, one trial more!"

And again he put the key into the lock, and wrenched and wrested at it so long and with such fevered violence that his hands were covered with grazes and bruises, while back, knees, and shoulders too, ached painfully with the strain they were put to. A harsh, dry rattle in the throat accompanied the hopeless labor; all was in vain; the door stood fast as a rock.

Convinced at last that no efforts could avail to release him, Thys descended the steps and ran madly up and down in the darkness of the cellar, —a very Egyptian darkness,—in which not the faintest gleam or glimmer of light was perceptible,—a darkness as of a closed sepulchre.

Presently the wretch began to tear his hair and to dig his nails into his cheeks and forehead; then he strode along the floor from one corner of the vault to the other, as seeking some hidden outlet for escape. He groaned, he wept, he blasphemed, he stormed with incoherent words and inarticulate cries; then he mounted again upon the steps, and through the keyhole called upon Kate by name. Again he dashed his body

with all its force and all its weight against the door, and again descended into the cellar and ran round and round about it till utterly wearied out. At last his foot struck against the great stone, and he sank down upon it quite exhausted.

"And so this is the end?" he muttered, in his despair; "the end of all my striving? For the sake of gold I've made myself a fiend! have become a murderer! and now here I sit in this dark vault, where no one can hear me; and here, perhaps,—perhaps I shall die here,—die of hunger! Horrible! If that should be God's counsel against me! It was so that I thought to kill Uncle Jan—by starvation! And to die thus in the midst of gold! to pine away and perish upon heaps of gold! to have the key to all this world's joys and glories in my hands, and to die like a dog, and then to burn forever in the fire of hell; and here on earth to be cried out upon at once, with curses and ridicule, as a villain too stupid to reap the fruits of his villany! A curse upon it!"

A dismal echo from the vaulted roof responded to the imprecation, and when that died away the silence remained long unbroken. Then again groans and sobs might have been heard through the darkness, sounds of weeping and of gnashing of teeth.

Thys had now sat for some considerable time upon his stone; more than once he had risen from it and returned to it; when, at last, all at

once a ray of light flashed upon the wall, which seemed to descend into the cellar through the keyhole of the door. Joyfully he sprang from his seat, hastily he mounted the steps, and then, with his lips to the keyhole, and quivering with renewed hope:—

"Kate, dear Kate," he cried, "is that you?'

"It's I, sure enough," was the answer he received.

"Ah, Kate, just see what's the matter with the door on the outside: it won't open."

"I should think not. I've fastened it with the great bar," was the reply.

"You fastened it? Why? Kate, dear Kate, don't play tricks with me; for God's sake open the door."

"Do you think it likely?" answered the voice from without. "Here have I got a venomous beast in a trap, and do you think I'm going to let it out to bite me and every one else that comes in its way? Make an act of repentance, Thys; it's all over with you; God and poor Kate have come up with you in the end."

Now at last Thys saw into the widow's intentions, and again a shiver of terror came upon him. With faltering voice he cried,—

"Kate, I've a bag of gold here for you."

"I'll have nothing to do with the stolen money."

"Two bags, Kate! Ah, open the door! do open it!"

This time there was no answer. He resumed:—

"Kate, you shall have four bags. Listen, listen! it's all of it gold!"

And he let a handful of the coin roll upon the steps, in the hope that the chink of it might yet tempt her.

A mocking laugh responded to the seductive sound.

"Kate," he began again, imploringly, "I'll marry you, and we'll share the whole fortune together. There's so much of it!—oh, so much!"

"Thief! murderer! villain!" was all the reply he could elicit.

"Ah, Kate," he went on, in a piteous tone, "here I am upon my knees in the darkness, holding out my trembling hands to you for help. Have compassion with me! be merciful! open the door, and I will love you and be grateful to you my life long."

"I have compassion with you!" answered Kate.

"Ah!" he cried, with reawakened hope, "I knew you would let me out!"

"I have compassion with you," the widow repeated, jeeringly; "just as much compassion as you had with Cecilia. I am merciful toward you, just as you were toward Uncle Jan, your benefactor. But that's not what I came here for, Thys; I came to show you something. Look through the keyhole at what I have in my hands; and look what I am going to do."

Thys put his eye to the keyhole, and, as the light was on the outside, could see pretty well what was going on there. Unfolding a paper, Kate went on:—

"Do you see this? You murdered the sick old man because you'd got him to make a will that gave you every thing and he didn't die soon enough for you; and now you think the property can't slip through your fingers. The will was in your bedroom, in the bottom drawer of the chest. Kate is poor, but she has learned to read; so, now, listen."

And she read out distinctly, word for word,—

"I hereby give all my estate and effects whatsoever to Charles Dominic Matthias —— and I declare this to be my last will and testament."

"My will! my will!" howled Thys, in despair.

"Look now what I'm going to do," pursued the beggar-woman.

"Heavens! heavens!" he cried; "she's tearing it to pieces! My hope, my life! You're murdering me, Kate!"

By a slight movement of the light he perceived that she was preparing to depart. Making one last effort, he cried, in a piercing tone,—

"Kate, Kate! ah, don't go! Open the door! do open it! You're never going to let me perish with hunger in this horrible vault?"

"It would only be God's righteous judgment on you," she replied, "if I were to let you die as you intended Uncle Jan should die; but such a

death is too good for you. You'll be let out directly. I've been to the burgomaster, and he has sent the constable to fetch people that will open the cellar and let you out, but with your hands tied behind you. It's to go to prison that you'll come out. It's upon the scaffold that you must die—die as a murderer, and as a murderer appear before God, who knows what a fiend of wickedness you are."

Thys heard his sentence as though struck with sudden petrifaction. All trembling, he continued to watch through the keyhole while Kate and her light gradually retired along the passage. As the last gleam of the lamp disappeared before his eye, a frightful cry burst from him. Presently his vital energies failed him; he rolled to the foot of the steps, and there lay, stretched like a corpse on the floor of the vault.

CHAPTER IX.

THE first early dawn was shedding its gray light into the chamber in which Thys had carried out his murderous plot against Uncle Jan's life. Two candles of yellow wax stood burning on the table beside a crucifix, together with a palm-branch in a vessel of holy water.

There lay the body on the bed, stretched out upon its back. To look on the pale and collapsed features no one would have doubted but that the last spark of life had long since been extinguished, and that the body was in fact a corpse. Nevertheless, this judgment would have been premature, for the chest still heaved,—heaved, indeed, as in death's last agony, as in the soul's last hard struggle to release herself from the bonds of earth.

At the bed's head stood a maiden, bending forward over the old man's face, watching with feverish anxiety every breath he drew, now quivering with hope, now melting in grief, as he gave signs of coming to himself or of falling off into insensibility.

It was Cecilia, who for an hour past, amid floods of silent tears, and all but exhausted with suffering, had been endeavoring with the tenderest

cares to recall her poor old uncle to life. Wanna stood near her beside the bed, ready to co-operate in her efforts to arrest the departing soul. Farther off, in a corner of the room, Bart and his mother were kneeling, murmuring with folded hands an earnest prayer to God.

The rector had already visited the sick man and administered extreme unction. The doctor had also been called in, and had soon perceived that it was chiefly want of proper food that had brought the sufferer to this pass; he had therefore ordered that broth should be given him, spoonful by spoonful, together with some medicine which he prescribed. On the table by the bed stood a basin and a phial, in which the medicaments in question were contained. Already had Cecilia cautiously dribbled a good many spoonfuls of the broth into the old man's mouth, and seemed to herself to perceive that it did him good, and that it gradually went down his throat more and more easily, as though the patient himself relished it and sucked it in.

And now she again set the spoon to his mouth, and, after having slowly poured in its contents, was about to take it away, when it seemed to her as though she could discern a slight movement in the old man's lips. A thrill of agitation ran through her at the thought. She tried him again with another spoonful; he swallowed it with an unmistakable play in the muscles of the throat.

Quivering with hope, and quite beside herself,

the maiden followed up the doses of broth, all the while anxiously watching her patient's countenance. Presently, and all suddenly, a convulsive vibration seemed to run throughout his limbs; he stretched himself out, then remained motionless; his respiration seemed utterly at a standstill.

A cry burst from Cecilia's bosom,—a cry of terror and of anguish, that at once frightened up Bart and his mother from their knees and brought them hurrying to the bedside. There lay Cecilia with her head upon the old man's bosom, sobbing aloud and copiously bedewing it with her warm tears; breaking forth ever and anon into sharp exclamations of grief and pain, or showering down kisses upon the cold lips of him whose death she mourned.

But soon again another cry burst from her, this time one of surprise and joy. Uncle Jan had moved his lips, was opening and shutting his mouth as though his body was mechanically craving after food. She jumped up, and with feverish haste poured into his mouth two or three spoonfuls of the broth in rapid succession. In her joy she would probably thus have given him the whole basinful, if the remembrance of the physician's warning had not held her hand. Bearing these in mind, she laid the spoon down again, again approached her face closely to that of the old man, and narrowly watched the effect of this fresh dose of nourishment.

Suddenly the sick man's eyes opened, but still fell as if unconsciously upon the sweet countenance that so delightedly smiled upon him.

"Uncle! father! you live! Thanks, oh thou merciful God!" Cecilia ejaculated, in a voice faltering with emotion.

Again he closed his eyes, again for a while he lay motionless as a corpse. Then he opened them anew upon the maiden, and for a long time kept them intently fixed upon hers, as though questioning his memory who she might be. Imperceptibly his arm began to move; he slowly brought it round the maiden's neck, drew her head down to him, and kissed her, while almost inaudibly he spoke,—

"Cecilia!"

This kiss, the sound of his voice, of her own name uttered by it, seemed to strike Cecilia with overpowering emotion. Releasing herself gently but hastily from the circling arm, "Pray, oh pray!" she cried to the others who stood with her by the bed, threw herself upon her knees before the crucifix, and raised her hands in thanks to the image of the dying Savior.

Then for some moments she remained immersed in the most fervent prayer, then sprang to her feet again and returned to the bed. She found the old man lying upon his side, looking round the room with unsteady and wondering gaze; he pointed with his finger at the three figures which were still on their knees upon the floor.

"Who?" he inquired, with feeble voice.

"Oh God, oh God! he lives! he speaks! he'll recover! my poor uncle, my kind father!" Cecilia cried, seizing both his hands in hers and pressing them with the most earnest affection.

The sick man smiled sweetly upon her; then he again turned an inquiring look upon the kneeling figures.

"It's Bart,—Bart, who is praying for you, dear uncle," she said, "and his mother and his sister Wanna; they are all sending up prayers to God for your recovery."

"Bart?" murmured the old man, as though not comprehending what he heard; "Bart? he praying here? and for me?"

"Come! come!" the maiden cried; "Bart! Mother Ann, don't you hear? my uncle's recovering! he knows his poor Cecilia! Come!"

They all rose from their knees and approached the bed. The old man's eyes wandered from face to face, to each in turn, and seemed to rest with especial attention upon the countenance of the youth who stood close by, his eyes streaming with tears of joy. After a few moments Uncle Jan reached out his thin hand toward Bart, drew him slowly downward, downward till their lips met, and impressed with his upon those of the young man a kiss—the blessed kiss of reconciliation.

Cecilia's legs trembled under her; she was obliged to lean upon the table to save herself from falling. This demonstration of kindly feeling in

her uncle had so affected her that she quivered in every limb and seemed ready to give way under the violence of her emotion. And not less were the others moved; from the eyes of each and all gushed forth a new flood of tears.

But now suddenly and hastily the beggar-woman entered the room, calling,—

"Cecilia, Bart, Wanna! come quick! quick below!"

She approached the bed, beheld with astonishment the old man's improved condition, and said,—

"Ah! thanks to God in heaven for that! Mother Ann, stay you here;—but Bart and Cecilia and Wanna must see my morning's work to the end. Quick! come down all of you!"

And as no one seemed to comprehend her, or made any movement toward following her, she caught Bart and Cecilia by the hand and drew them along with her out of the room.

Below, in front of the house, stood a crowd of people waiting for something. They spoke with indignation and horror of the attempt at murder made by Thys upon the old man, and exulted in the thought that he was now about to receive the due reward of his wickedness. The gendarmes had passed through the village, and the people had followed them to the Abbey farm.

Cecilia and Bart stood with the widow in the room below, without knowing what spectacle it was that they were called upon to witness. Pre-

sently they heard in the passage which led to the back part of the building the tramp of heavy steps and clank of arms. While in astonishment and terror they listened to these unexpected sounds, and while Kate laughed triumphantly, two gendarmes made their appearance in the room, and then two more with Thys between them, his hands tied behind him, his head hung down, pale, crushed into nothingness with shame, and trembling in every limb.

At this spectacle Cecilia gave a loud cry, and instantly covered her eyes with her hands and turned her face toward the wall to escape it; while Bart stared as though petrified at the frightful procession which went by him.

"Look!" cried the widow, in exultation; "so God punishes the evil-doer, even if a poor beggar-woman must be the instrument of His purpose!"

And as the gendarmes approached the door with their prisoner, she further exclaimed,—

"Hypocritical villain! murderer! run, make haste! the scaffold, the guillotine, are for you — and then, to close all, hell, — yes, hell and its eternal fire!"

Thys was now led away by the officers. But no sooner had the crowd collected outside caught sight of him than a universal and terrible cry of vengeance burst forth against him, which made him bow his head yet deeper upon his breast, trembling the while as though he felt that his last hour was striking. He was pale as a corpse, his

hair all in disorder, his clothes soiled and torn; on his hands showed the dried blood from recent wounds, the result of the superhuman efforts he had made to force the door of the vault from its hinges.

The sight of this blood stimulated the rage of the assembled peasants to the pitch of madness; they regarded it as the palpable evidence of his crime, and with terrible cries excited one another to present vengeance. Unquestionably they would have made a summary and terrible example of him, had not his captors met the danger by drawing their swords and preparing to defend their prisoner resolutely in case of need.

The sight of the flashing steel struck terror into the multitude, who now gave up the idea of taking the law into their own hands, but still followed the gendarmes into the village, crying vengeance upon the murderer, and loading him with imprecations until he and his escort disappeared from their view along the road that led toward the town whither he was destined.

Ten years have gone by since the events above narrated passed. The miser's abode has changed its aspect, which is now that of a comfortable farm-house with extensive out-buildings. Three horses and twelve cows occupy its stables; farming-men and maid-servants are seen about the yard;

the cheerful sounds of labor enliven it from morning to night. The window-frames are painted green, the walls are repaired and whitewashed; every thing about tells of prosperity and comfort.

When the sun shines there sits on the bench near the door an old man, whose tremulous hands bespeak his feebleness; beside him an aged woman sits knitting. The old man plays with two little children, a boy and a girl, and lectures them about frugality, the true source of all wealth. These are the children of his niece Cecilia; Bart is their father, and the old woman is Mother Ann, whom they call grandmother.

Old Uncle Jan has lent Bart money:—a good sum of money, and at right moderate interest, which is regularly paid him, and which he as regularly lays by for the little boy that sits upon his knee. He is so fond of the little boy!—it is his pet, and is called, after him, Jan. He is so happy—the good uncle—in his old day! True, he is always lamenting and finding fault over the excessive voracity of the servants and lavish scale of expenditure generally; but Bart and Cecilia let him talk, and take their own way, and so they are all satisfied.

The poor Widow Kate lives at the Chapel farm; her children are now growing up, and work away diligently. Bart helps her along; she has a good farm, and is quite in the way of being well to do in the world.

Wanna is married to the head-gardener at the

Manor-house; she lives in the midst of flowers, and is much in favor with her wealthy master and mistress. She too is contented and happy.

The only one that is otherwise is the evil-doer, who will never leave the prison to which he is condemned till it may please God to call him before the eternal judgment-seat.

THE END.

Ricketicketack.

Ricketicketack;

BY

HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

Translated from the Original Flemish.

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RICKETICKETACK.

CHAPTER I.

Not long since I paid a visit to the farm-house at which the story I am about to tell opens. It stands between Desschel and Milgem, eastward of Antwerp, on the great moor of Kempen; and of the people who now live there hardly one remembers the name of Jan van Dael.

The house and its immediate belongings strike the eye pleasantly;—rather, however, in the way of picturesqueness than of beauty. The roof is old and covered with a rich growth of houseleek and green moss; the crumbling walls are half-concealed by a luxuriant vine; the yard is enlivened with fowls and pigeons; and in a stable three cows, shining with cleanliness, munch the soft clover.

But the landscape in which the farm lies has real beauty, after its kind. In front, an endless heath stretches away to the horizon; behind the little flower-garden, a silver brook, fringed with willows and deep-green sappy-looking alders,

threads the moor, and farther down runs through a bit of scanty pasture; the blue vault of heaven arches in the whole; all round, the grasshoppers chirp unseen, and the birds trill a merrier note about this fair oasis in the wide waste of sand.

It was a fine morning in the year 1807. The sun was still beneath the horizon; hardly was the silence broken by here and there a stray bird preluding to the full chorus of Nature's morning concert. In the house and yard all was still too, only in one room there burned a small fire, lightly crackling in the wide fireplace; the clock ticked on and on, and from a half-dark corner was heard the monotonous buzz of a spinning-wheel.

At the wheel sat a girl. Her age, to judge by her looks, might be fifteen. She did not seem to have bestowed much pains on her dress—rather the reverse; but her features had in them something out of the common,—something of elevation, which might well fix attention and attract sympathy. Yet beauty she could not be said to possess, for she was marble-pale, and ever and anon her dark eyes flashed forth from under their long lashes with a harsh and repulsive expression. And yet, again, there were moments in which the black pupil wandered slowly and dreamily up and down, in which a glad smile lighted up her features, as if some spark of joy had suddenly kindled in her heart; then she might indeed be called beautiful—an alabaster antitype of the flower which, slowly fading away, still opens its

cup to the sun while a worm has long ago gnawed its root.

Already for an hour past she had been sitting at her wheel, mechanically passing the flax through her fingers. A deep reverie seemed to hang about her, like a thick cloud; for her the world was not. An unearthly joy shone forth from her countenance.

And what pleasant thoughts were they that thus warmed her heart? That she could not have told herself. And now she opens her well-formed mouth; she sings. Does the song speak out her feelings? If so, there must be a great deal in it. Sweet and clear, but low, is the voice, as of a silver bell in the distance; but the singular jingle of the tune contrasts strangely with the general effect. Here are the words:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
The iron's warm;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

And as soon as the words are sung she sinks back into her reverie.

While she thus sat at her wheel, unconscious of all about her, an elderly woman came downstairs and entered the room. The look that she cast upon the expiring fire and the dreamer in the corner showed at once the mistress of the house. Her eyes flashed with anger; she darted upon the

spinner, and struck her so violent a box on the ear that the poor girl had nearly fallen from her chair.

"What's this, you lazy lump? There you sit, staring before you like a stuck pig! Make up the fire directly, or I'll be after you with a stick, and give it you well, you good-for-nothing monkey!"

The girl got up and went to the fire. She seemed pretty well broken in to her mistress's ill-usage, for her marble features gave not the slightest sign either of annoyance or of pain; but the redness on one of her cheeks sufficiently witnessed how hard the blow had been.

As soon as the mistress saw the fire blaze up under the kettle, she proceeded to the stair-foot, and called, at the top of her voice,—

"Up, up, you lazybones, all! Must I come to fetch you down, sleepy-heads? Come! look alive! —Kate, Barbara, Jan! As I'm alive, here's four o'clock, and the whole set of you not done snoring!"

A minute or two, and down came the sleepers. The two girls were the daughters of the house,—a little turned of twenty, it might be; right peasant-girls, burly and sturdy, with nothing taking about them.

Jan was a lad of seventeen, of features somewhat boorish, but not at all irregular, and of an open, manly countenance, with a good deal of expression. You might see at once in him a sound-

hearted, honest young fellow, without any unusual gifts of capacity. His blue eyes and long fair hair gave him an especial air of good-nature, which, in truth, belonged to him.

He alone came up to the girl, who was still standing by the fire, and said to her, in a low voice,—

"Good-morning, Magdalen."

And, still lower, she answered him,—

"Thank you, Jan. Good-morning."

The coffee was set on the table; and each one, before going off to work, got a slice of bread and butter. The mistress served out the portions, and poor Magdalen's was hardly enough for a little child; but of this she seemed to take no notice, and neither mien nor countenance showed the slightest sense of ill-treatment. But Jan's looks were full of compassion for her; and, as soon as he saw she had nearly finished her slice, he took the opportunity of his mother's eyes being turned another way to share his own with her.

Directly after breakfast, Jan and his sisters turned out to their day's work. Magdalen remained behind, along with her mistress; it was her business to stand by the churn while the dog turned the wheel.

As soon as the cream was in the churn and every thing ready for beginning, out went the mistress into the yard to fetch the dog which was to turn the wheel; but, behold!—the dog lay dead in his kennel. At this her wrath broke

all bounds; in a fury of passion, she dashed back into the room, gave Magdalen another box on the ear, and drove her out of the house, exclaiming,—

"See there, you abominable hussy! You have given the poor beast nothing to eat yesterday, and there he is, starved to death. But I'll teach you! Here!"

And again she struck the girl—who all the while said nothing—still more violently, rating her the while, and calling out,—

"Yes, you won't say a word, if you burst for it, you obstinate good-for-nothing! It isn't true, I suppose, eh, that you gave the dog nothing to eat? eh? Speak, will you? or I'll wring your neck for you."

"Mistress," said Magdalen, in an apathetic kind of tone, "I gave the dog his food yesterday, and there it stands by his kennel; he hasn't touched it, and the dish is quite full."

"The dish full, indeed!" screamed the other; "you lying monkey! You filled the dish this morning. Do you think I don't know your tricks? But I'll make you repent it. Yes, you shall pay for it; you shall turn the wheel yourself. So come, in with you!"

This new and cruel combination of insult and ill-treatment was evidently a hard blow to Magdalen. She trembled in every limb, and stood in the middle of the room, with downcast face and arms unstrung, like one condemned to death

and on the point of being led to the scaffold. Still, not a word did she utter.

But her mistress was only the more irritated by her silent endurance. She snatched a stick from the fagot that lay by the fireplace, and raised her arm, as though to fall upon Magdalen with it.

"Come! quick! will you get into the wheel or not?"

The poor girl fell on her knees, lifted her hands as in supplication, cast a piteous look of entreaty from her dark eyes half-filled with tears, and at last spoke:—

"Ah! do have mercy on me! I will turn the wheel, but for God's sake don't beat me."

At this moment the door flew open, and Jan hastily entered the room. He ran up to Magdalen, raised her from her knees, and, turning to his mother, exclaimed, with ill-suppressed vexation,—

"But, mother, how can you go on so? It's ever and again the same story. I can't turn my back to go to work but I hear you scolding and raving at Magdalen as if she was a dumb beast. If you want her dead, you'd better by half kill her at once. Can't you see that she's ill and wasting away?"

At the last words tears gushed from Jan's eyes, and he added, in a calmer but earnest tone,—

"Ah, mother! do let her alone! Else see,

(mind, I tell you,) I'll be off with the first soldiers that go by, and you don't see me again my life long."

"I tell you she shall take the dog's place in the churning-wheel. I'll teach her to let him starve!" screamed his mother.

"What's that you say?" asked Jan, quite out of himself, "she — Magdalen—run in the churning-wheel? So ho, mother, that's going too far! Now, tell me quick, do you really mean it? Quick! quick!"

"Look you, then! how the fool stands, shaking like an aspen!" cried the mother, mockingly. "And what then if I do really mean it?"

"Then, I tell you, mother," replied Jan, seriously and firmly, "as soon as Magdalen is in the wheel I'm out of the house: chains shouldn't hold me; and if you won't believe me when I say it, I swear it, by all that's fearful."

At this a very spasm of vexation and rage passed over the angry woman. She felt obliged to give way, for except Jan she had nothing but women on the farm, and he had already enough both of strength and experience in some degree to stop the gap made by his father's premature death: without him she could not possibly have carried on the concern.

"Get out of my sight, you lazy good-for-nothing!" cried she. "Take the white cow to grass, hussy, and don't let me see you again before four o'clock, if you don't want your ribs well

basted! And you, Jan, go and tell Kate to come and help me to churn."

Magdalen walked off slowly toward the shed, to fetch the cow. As she went out at the door she turned toward Jan, who came close after her, and gave him a look, languid but full of feeling, as if she would have said,—

"Thanks to you; you are protecting a corpse. I will pray for you when I am in heaven."

CHAPTER II.

She took her way with the cow toward the brook, which was edged about with a scanty growth of grass. Slowly she went, step by step, leading the creature after her by a cord. At last she reached the line where the heath passed into a range of lower-lying boggy pastures and the alder and juniper-bushes formed a closer thicket; there she left the footpath. A solitary beech stands there—sown probably by a bird, for as far as eye can see it descries no similar foliage. Magdalen sank down at the foot of the tree. Deeply she bowed her head; motionless she gazed on space; the cord fell from her hand, and her accustomed reverie came over her.

Now, in the free open air, under the beautiful deep blue heaven, the sore load of trouble which weighed upon her heart fell from it. Her lips complained not; no sigh heaved her bosom; but a quiet rill of clear pearls trickled into her lap. Long, very long, she sat there without changing her position; but by degrees her tears fell more slowly, till at last she lifted her head, and, with a calmer air, fell into her old favorite tune:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
The iron's warm;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

What could this strange jingle mean? It would have been useless to ask Magdalen, for she knew not herself how or why it was that of themselves, and, so to say, without consciousness or will of hers, the unmeaning words came tripping over her lips. A faint recollection she had of some one having once been used to sing them to her; but that was now long, long ago. They spoke but indistinctly; still, they had ever more and more fixed themselves in her train of associations, had become ever more and more the accompaniment both of her joys and sorrows.

After she had repeated them a few times, and each time less sadly, she seemed quite to have forgotten her melancholy and the causes of it. She stood up, her countenance radiant with contentment, briskly led the cow to a place where there was better pasture, and then ran toward a sandy hillock which rose a little above the general surface of the heath.

It was evident that she often visited this spot, for where she sat down there was an indentation in the ground, as from frequent pressure. Steadying herself with her hands on her knees, she fixed her eyes on a bluish point far away upon the ex-

tremest verge of the horizon;—a town it was, probably, or at least a large village. Whatever it was, from this point a road led over the heath, which it traversed in a hundred playful turns, till by the farm-house it was lost amid the undulations of the moor. Thus sitting there, she might represent a fisherman's orphaned daughter looking out from a high promontory of the downs upon the sea now subsiding into repose, anxiously expecting a boat which, alas! will never return more. Her case, however, was not precisely such. True, she was earnestly looking out for something, but what it was that her heart was yearning after she knew not. With unwearied eye she gazed upon the road, doubtless in the unconscious hope that by it he that should release her from her bondage would one day approach; but meanwhile she knew no one in the world but those immediately about her, and hundreds of travellers might pass by without her taking especial notice of any one of them. A poor silly thing her mistress's daughters called her, but in truth she was any thing but that.

Total abandonment and continued oppression had thrown Magdalen back upon herself, had compelled her to develop an inward life of her own. In the solitude into which, for the most part, she was banished, her intellect had acquired refinement and her imagination strength. All that went on with her she weighed and pondered upon right narrowly, felt right deeply; but the sum

of all her ponderings and impressions remained close locked up in her inmost heart.

By this time the sun's rays were falling upon the western declivity of the sandy hillock; it was long past mid-day, and Magdalen still sat there, her eye fixedly bent upon the blue point. She was hungry, and felt it sharply; nevertheless, she sat on.

At last might be seen a young peasant cautiously making his way through the alder-thicket which skirted the brook. Every now and then he turned back his head toward the farm-house, as if afraid of being discovered, till at last he made a stand by the beech at the foot of which Magdalen had sat weeping. Arrived there, he turned toward the sandy hillock, formed a trumpet with his hands, the more surely to direct his voice, and called,—

"Magdalen! Magdalen!"

At the call she rose from her seat, and slowly came up to the peasant-lad, who, pointing with his finger to a suitable place, invited her to sit down beside him. This done, he produced from under his smock-frock a thick slice of bread and a bit of bacon, which he offered to Magdalen, having first cut the bacon into strips with his knife and spread it over the bread. Then he brought out from his pocket a little stone bottle of beer, set it down at the foot of a juniper-bush, and said, in a low voice,—

"There, Magdalen! now you have victuals and drink."

The poor girl gave him a look of hearty thanks, and began to eat the food he had brought her.

"God will reward you, Jan," at last she said, "for thus helping and comforting me in my misery. I thank you very much for all your goodness and kindness to me."

A violent pang, meanwhile, agitated the young man's breast; he said nothing, but a stray tear trickled down his cheek. When Magdalen had finished her meal, she laid her hand on his shoulder, and said,—

"Jan, my best friend, do not grieve yourself so much about me; your tears hurt me more than your mother's blows."

"Forgive her, Magdalen, for my sake; for if you were to die without having forgiven her, and without saying a prayer for her, there can be no heaven for her."

"I have nothing to forgive her, Jan. There is no hatred in me; I do not even think any more on what I have to bear; every thing of the kind is already forgotten."

"Don't deceive me, Magdalen. It is not possible to forget such barbarous ill-treatment."

"I've told you the same thing more than once, and you don't understand me; and, indeed, I hardly understand myself. When I am beaten and knocked about, to-be-sure my body suffers, but my mind remains free, and goes on dreaming

of mysterious things that I know not of, which dart hither and thither before me and cheer and gladden me. These dreams comfort my soul; in them I forget every thing; they speak to me of another and a better life, and give me hope that I shall not always be an orphan. Will God in heaven be a father to me? or shall I see my mother before I die? I know not."

"Your parents are dead, Magdalen. My mother has often told me so. But don't let that make you unhappy. Just see what a pair of arms I have already! Yet a few years, and I shall be a man, and a strong one too. Ah, Magdalen, do but live till then, and I will gladly work for you from morning to night, if I am to be your servant forever and a day."

"You my servant? No! that won't do, Jan. Just look at me, now, and tell me what you see in my face."

The lad hid his eyes with his hands, and sighed out, in an under-tone,—

"Death! Alas! death!'

For some time the two sat side-by-side without speaking. At last Jan took Magdalen's hand, and said,—

"Magdalen, you never knew father or mother; from a little child you have been brought up in our house, and there—my soul and body!—you have had to bear more than enough for any ten mortal creatures. If that was to go on so you must die, sure enough; that I must acknowledge

with tears in my eyes. But if from this time forward you were left alone and well treated, don't you think you might live then?"

"Live then?" repeated Magdalen. "Who knows when his time shall come? I know what you are going to do; but why for my sake provoke your mother and turn her hatred upon yourself?"

"Why?" cried Jan, half vexed; "why? that I don't know myself. But this I can tell you: that if you have one fixed thought or dream that follows you everywhere, I have one of my own, too, that never leaves me,—neither in the hardest work or the fastest sleep. And that thought is that I must make good to you the evil that my mother lays upon you. Ah, Magdalen, I can't express myself so well or so strongly as you can, but for God's sake don't doubt what I say. From the day that you die, not a stroke of work more will I do, and they'll soon lay me by you under the turf in the churchyard. And if you ask me why,—why, I can't tell you that either. Look you: I have a heart that can feel under my smock-frock, after all; you are a poor thing without father or mother, and that's enough for me. Ah! only do live till I am of age, Magdalen; my work will——"

"Home with the cow!" cried a threatening voice in the distance.

Jan rose from his seat, cast once more a look of entreaty upon Magdalen, and disappeared

among the alder-bushes, whispering to her, as he went,—

"I shall come in directly. Go along; she won't beat you now."

Magdalen caught up the cow's leading-string, turned slowly into the footpath, and took her way homeward.

CHAPTER III.

In the village of Westmal, some two or three miles from Antwerp, on the road toward Turnhout, stood a little smithy, in which four men—the master and his three journeymen—were busy at various work in the way of their trade; and at the same time were conversing—as much, that is, as the noise of the hammers and files would let them—about Napoleon and his mighty deeds of war. One of the journeymen, who had lost two fingers of his left hand, was just beginning a story of the Italian wars, when two horsemen pulled up before the door, and one of them called out,—

"Hola, my men! my horse wants shoeing."

The journeymen looked curiously at the strangers, who by this time had dismounted. They were evidently both military men. One of them had a great scar right across his face and wore a red riband in his button-hole; the other, though dressed like a gentleman, seemed in some sort his subordinate; he held the horse by the bridle, and asked,—

"Which shoe, colonel?"

"The near fore-foot, lieutenant," was the reply.

One of the journeymen took the horse and led

it into the shed, and meanwhile the colonel entered the smithy, looked about him, and took up, first one, then another, of the tools, as if looking out for an old acquaintance. At last he seemed to have found what he wanted: in one hand he held a heavy pair of tongs, in the other a hammer, both of which he surveyed with so peculiar a smile that the journeymen stood round gaping and staring, in no little amaze.

Meanwhile the iron was in the fire, the bellows panted away, and a garland of sparks spurted from the glowing coals. The journeymen stood by the anvil, their hammers in hand, till the master took the iron from the fire; then began the work of forging.

The colonel evidently took a lively interest in what was going on; his features lighted up, as they might have done at the finest music. But when the shoe was taken from the anvil, as ready for putting on, he eyed it a moment not a little disdainfully, took the tongs which held it from the master-smith's hand, and put it back into the fire.

"That will never do," said he; "the shoe's too clumsy by half, master. Now, my lads! look alive! blow away!"

And while one of the journeymen, with an air of great respect, obeyed his directions, he threw off his coat and bared his sinewy arms. Soon the iron was at a white heat: he turned it twice or thrice in the fire with all the air of an experienced hand, laid it on the anvil, and then called to the journeymen, in a cheerful tone,—

"Now, my men! Look out! I'll give the time, and we'll turn out a shoe fit for the emperor's nags. So now, attention:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
The iron's warm;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo.

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
Strike while it's hot,
And tarry not.
Again, one, two,
Ricketicketoo.

There; look at the shoe now."

The journeymen eyed the light neat piece of work agape, and, as it were, struck dumb. The master, meanwhile, seemed to be turning some thought in his head, which he every now and then shook, as though quite unable to come to a satisfactory conclusion. He drew near to the stranger, who by this time had resumed his coat; but, however closely he scanned him, he seemed unable to recognise him.

The horse was soon shod, and now stood before the smithy ready for its master to mount, who took leave of the party with a friendly shake of the hand to each, laying also a couple of gold-pieces on the anvil:—

"One for the master, one for the men. Drink my health together, and good-by to you."

With these words, he threw himself into the saddle and rode off with his companion.

Hardly were the two strangers round the corner, when, of one accord, the journeymen began to cast looks of inquiry on the master.

"Colonel! colonel!" at last growled one of them; "I say it, and I'll stand to it, the fellow's a smith, or he's been one. I can't help thinking you know him, master."

"Well," replied the master, "I never in my life knew but one man that could knock off a shoe like that—so light and neat, and so handily; and I must be very much mistaken if the colonel isn't just Karl van Milgem himself; he, you know—but to-be-sure you don't know—he that the folks used always to call Ricketicketack."

"What? The colonel the merry smith of Westmal?" asked one of the journeymen. "I've heard talk enough about Karl Ricketicketack; but he was a good-for-nothing fellow,—a drunken dog, fit to turn the whole village upside-down. No, no, that will never do; the colonel doesn't look like that either."

The master seated himself upon the anvil, as one that has a story to tell, and began as follows:—

"My men, our day's work is paid for twice over, so we can afford to rest a little. The colonel is Karl van Milgem, sure enough. I'll tell you his story as shortly as I can, and then you can say yourselves what you think about it. About

sixteen years ago there lived at this very smithy a young fellow who was married to the prettiest girl in all the country about. She came from Moll; and so fond were they of one another that it was a wonder and a pleasure to the whole village to see them. Well, that was Karl van Milgem, of whom we are talking. That was the fellow for work; early in the morning and late at night he was at it, till his face ran down with sweat, and all the while he kept time to that nice little tune that the colonel knows so well; so that among ourselves every one called him Karl Ricketicketack. He was always in spirits, and a regular witty fellow; there never came a word out of his mouth but what might set one laughing. And so in all Westmal there was no such favorite as the merry smith. He had been married a couple of years, and had no children: at last, however, he was expecting one. At this news he was merrier than ever; there was no end to his Ricketicketack, and at times one got quite afraid he was going out of his wits with joy, for, when the fit took him, cart-ropes wouldn't hold him. At last the day came, and he had his wish; but, poor fellow! his wife never got over it. She lies buried in our church-yard there, where the iron cross stands. From that moment Karl was never the same man again. He left his hammer and anvil to themselves, and didn't light his forge-fire twice in a week; and he began to drink as though he was

determined to make an end of himself. All his songs were forgotten, and he led such a life that he was a scandal to the whole village. When he came home drunk, he'd go on like a downright madman. But the servant-girl that lived with him and took care of his child had one way that never failed to quiet him: she used to put his little girl on his lap; and, however far gone he might be, as soon as he saw the child it seemed as though an enchantment had come over him. He would laugh out as merrily as ever, set the little thing on his knee, and ride cock-horse with her to the old tune of Ricketicketack. That Karl was ever at bottom a bad man I don't believe. Everybody knew well enough that it was his wife's death that had made him desperate and drunken; for every time that he crossed the churchyard and came to the iron cross, even if he was so that he couldn't keep his feet, he'd break out into tears before all the world. And so every one had great compassion for him, and the neighbors took care that the child wanted for nothing, without saying any thing to him about it. So things went on for three years, till at last Karl was suddenly taken ill, and obliged to keep his bed, and that for a pretty long time too. All this while his friends, and the clergyman too, talked so much to him about mending his ways that he seemed quite cured of drinking. But now he had got something else into his head. He had made up his mind to leave the village,

where the sight of his wife's grave was forever reminding him of his loss; so he sold off his smithy, with every thing in it, just as it stood, to my father, God rest his soul! and early one morning away he went, with his child on his arm, over the heath, without telling a soul where to, and away he stayed; and from that day to this neither he nor the child has been seen or heard of."

"Ah! the colonel is Karl Ricketicketack!" cried one of the journeymen. "That there's no doubt of."

"He it is, and no one else," said the master; "Didn't you see how he took up the tools and looked at them? Well, every thing that my father or I had made or bought he laid down again, quite carelessly; but every thing that had belonged to Karl Ricketicketack's smithy he looked at as though he would have eaten it: you must have noticed it yourselves, if you had your eyes open. And then his way of speaking, just like our people here—his handiness at the forge—and, above all, his little tune. Yes, yes! that's a lad out of our village, I'll lay my life of it. . . . Who'd have thought it? And now a colonel,—a real out-and-out colonel!"

While the smith and his people thus talked over Karl Ricketicketack and his doings, the two strangers had turned into the Crown, where they put up their horses and got some dinner themselves. Then the colonel left the inn, and pro-

ceeded on foot along the high-road to the corporation* clerk's house. There he was shown into a parlor, where he had to wait a pretty long while, till the official came in from his fields, and entered the room with many deep and formal bows, and thus opened:—

"Colonel van Milgem, your most obedient servant. I must beg that you will be graciously pleased to pardon my——"

But the colonel did not give him much time for ceremonies and fine speeches, and with a hearty grasp of his hand broke in upon him:—

"Well, my good friend, have you any news for me? is my child found?"

"No, colonel, not yet," replied the clerk, in a melancholy tone.

"God help me, then!" cried the soldier, with a gesture of desperation, striking his hand against his forehead. "Must I then give up all hope?"

"Be so good, colonel," pursued the clerk, "as to hear my report, and you will find that, so far from giving up all hope, we are, on the contrary, in all probability, on the right scent. On the occasion of your last visit you left me money enough to carry on my researches regardless of cost; and you may be assured that I have spared no pains to win your favor and the thousand

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* In Belgium and most other parts of the continent, not only the towns, but the rural parishes also, have a corporate organization for civil purposes.—Tr.

francs you promised me in case of success. Hear now the sum of the information I have got together. When Karl van Milgem" (and here the clerk bowed nearly to the ground) "left Westmal with his child, then four years old, he told no one where he was going to, and very likely did not know himself, for very trouble and sorrow. But now I have heard from yourself, colonel — and the result of my researches coincides with your information—that he intrusted his child to the care of an old schoolmaster at Weelde, on the other side of Turnhout, Peter Driessens by name, who lived with his wife in a lonely cottage at some distance from the village. To him he gave the child, and a little iron casket in which he had locked up the purchase-money of his smithy, and which, in case of need, the old people were to open, that the child and they might not want for any thing. Then he went off to Holland, and, it is believed, took service with the French army; at all events, he never afterward made any inquiry after his child;—at least so I was told at Weelde, and the people from whom I heard this had themselves known Peter Driessens."

"The people don't know what they say, my friend," interrupted the colonel. "I wrote twice from Egypt to inquire after the child, but got no answer. Afterward, on my return to France, after Kleber's death, I hoped to be able to find her out myself. How my heart beat as I trotted over the heath and came near the spot where

the old people's cottage had stood! But, alas! I found nothing but a heap of ashes. At that my heart was wellnigh breaking; what I felt it is impossible I can tell you. Luckily, however, I heard from the people of the place that Driessen had saved himself and the little Monica, and gone off and about to see if he could beg a little sum together toward making up his loss."

"Just so, colonel. The schoolmaster's wife was burnt to a coal; but he got away, with your Monica on his back and a little iron casket under his arm. He got a very strong certificate from his parish, and set out with the child through the villages about, to get a little help and find some means of making his living. I know from a sure hand that he was seen begging about with the little Monica at Meerhout, Olmen, Balen, and Moll; at the last place he fell ill, and there died. It is only since yesterday that I know when it was that he came to his end. The corporation clerk of Moll, my very good brother-in-office, has sent me the certificate of his death, and adds that nothing was found about the poor schoolmaster that could lead to any trace of the child, which he well knows I am on the search after. Of the iron casket, also, he says nothing. Do you think, colonel, Driessen can have been bad enough to do the child a mischief or to leave it behind somewhere in the heath or wood?"

"Oh no! certainly not!" cried the colonel; "he was my old schoolmaster, and was always

my friend — my best friend. When I came to him and told him I was going to Holland, to enlist in the army, he begged me of his own accord to leave the little thing with him, both to cheer him up in his old days, and for the child's sake, that it might not come into mere strangers' hands. I am assured, my dear sir, that he has left the child somewhere in good keeping, and the iron casket too!"

"That's what I think myself, colonel; and, as the result of my inquiries leads me to conjecture that Monica must be to be found somewhere between Rethy and Meerhout, I am minded to run over to Moll to-morrow and rummage up all the villages and farm-houses in the neighborhood."

"Well said, my friend; so do: your trouble shall not go unrewarded. I have still a few days to spare, and will see if I can't do something to help in the matter. To-night we shall sleep at Lichtaert, and to-morrow, about mid-day, we'll meet you at the clerk of Moll's house, and then we can talk over together what's to be done further. Don't spare the money, my good friend; take a comfortable carriage, and don't tire yourself to death for nothing. Good-by till to-morrow, then, and God grant us success!"

With these words, the colonel rose from his chair, shook the clerk by the hand, and returned to the Crown. An hour later, two horsemen were trotting away on the road toward Lichtaert.

CHAPTER IV.

It was still early the next morning when the colonel and lieutenant were riding along the serpentine windings of the road across the heath to Moll.

Already the sun stood in all its glory in the blue sky, and drew up from the wide expanse of sand a hovering mist, which gave the heath much the appearance of an immense hearth with a colorless flame flickering over it. The peculiar aroma of the heather, and especially that characteristic scent of the heathery turf-fuel which under favorable circumstances of wind and weather indicates the neighborhood of these moors to a very considerable distance, and which no one that has once inhabited those countries could fail to recognise, however long absent, filled the air; the grasshoppers chirped their monotonous song, and thousands of little creatures besides played among the heather-flowers. Evidently the colonel was strongly affected. In just such an atmosphere had he passed the fairest years of his youth; every thing, down to the scanty grass itself, called up in him recollections, ah! how dear! His head deeply bowed upon his breast, he rode on before

his companion, letting the reins hang loosely on his horse's neck.

For more than an hour the young lieutenant respected his colonel's silence. At last, however, with a touch of the spur he brought up his horse alongside and attempted a word of consolation.

"Come, colonel," said he, in a sympathizing tone, "don't be so down-hearted, after all. I can quite understand that you long to see your child again; but a man like you, that has a thousand times looked death and the enemy in the face without blinking, shouldn't let himself be bowed down by any ordinary sorrow."

"An ordinary sorrow do you call it?" asked the colonel. "And yet in truth it is an ordinary sorrow, Adolph, but not for that the less deep. Just see, my friend: in my whole life I have never loved but one woman. Mere peasant-girl as she was, the thought of her has never left me, not even in the hottest of the field. She is dead, my poor Barbara, but she left me this child, which she gave me at the cost of her life. And now I must fear that this sole relic of my happy days is wandering about as a beggar, that she is actually suffering hunger and thirst, while I am in possession of the means of giving her every comfort of life; I have to think of Barbara as calling me to account for her child's lot——"

"Come, come, colonel!" interrupted the lieutenant, "you take the matter too imaginatively; but that is not the way to ease your suffering.

Look at things a little coolly. A soldier must have self-command enough to bear up under a misfortune, even were it still greater than yours."

"Do you think, then, my dear Adolph, it is as easy to cover the heart with steel as the body? If you do, you are much mistaken. I know you flatter yourself you've said good-by to feeling of every kind, and proud enough you seem of it too; though, ten to one, you're only deceiving yourself after all. It is six years since you left your village; is it not? Well, if at this moment your old mother's cottage were to come in view in the farthest horizon: what then?"

For a few moments the lieutenant was silent. At last, with downcast eyes and a look of some confusion, he replied—

"Well, colonel, that would cost me some tears."

"Then it can't be so very difficult for you to comprehend my giving myself up for a while to the joyful hope of finding my child again, and that I am ready to break out into tears of joy should God bring her once more into my arms. I have neither father nor mother, brother nor sister,—not even an uncle, aunt, or cousin. The only being in the whole wide world to which I am bound by any tie of blood is this child; and, when my poor Barbara died, she laid it in my arms, and her last words were, 'Ah! love it always!'"

These last words, uttered in a low, smothered voice, evidently affected the lieutenant; he pulled

in his horse, and fell behind without another word. Presently, however, the colonel noticed this, reined in his horse too, till they were in a line with one another again, and added, in a tone of deep emotion,—

"Adolph, if you were to lay your hand on my heart you would feel how thickly it is beating. Do not be surprised at seeing my eyes moist. Do you see yonder noble beech among the juniper-bushes by the brook? That tree heard my first word of love. Under that foliage a shrinking maiden received my avowal. Here, every thing knows me; grass, heath, brook, and tree, greet me in eloquent dumbness. Let us get off here; I should like to see if my name and Barbara's, which I once cut in the bark, are still there."

Accordingly, they both dismounted and led their horses, which, on the edge of the brook, they tied to a tree, and then crossed the narrow stream with a jump. In front of the beech, the colonel's folded hands sank down before him, his head drooped, and the look which he cast at the old love-token stole shyly from under his eyelashes.

But suddenly he started, as from an electric shock, and instantly began listening with strained attention to some faint sound from afar. The lieutenant, not a little surprised at his colonel's abrupt movement, looked about him for the cause of it: a sign prevented him from speaking or stirring.

From among the alder-bushes came the sound; and soon they could distinguish the notes, clear as a silver bell, of a girlish voice, and even the words which it sang:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
The iron's warm;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

The colonel still stood motionless as at first. He seemed to be listening for another verse, which soon followed:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
Strike while it's hot,
And tarry not.
Again, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

Hastily the colonel seized the lieutenant by the arm, and drew him rapidly along, exclaiming, as he went,—

"Come, come, my friend! Every nerve in me quivers. I feel as if death was upon me, something goes through me so! That was Barbara singing! 'Twas her voice and her song!"

The colonel once more caught his companion by the arm, and, without speaking a word, pointed to a young girl sitting on the grass at the foot of some juniper-bushes. She seemed to have no suspicion that she was watched, for her eyes were opened to the full, and steadily fixed on the beech-

tree, while she held the fingers of her right hand to her half-opened lips, as though to still the lightest buzz from the heath that might interfere with a sound which, from far or near, was stealing to her.

The colonel advanced a step, and then, for the first time, she became aware that strangers were at hand and noticing her with close attention. The fright of the first moment soon passed off, and a smile of indescribable feeling settled on her features.

Unable to contain his impatience, the colonel came quickly up to her, knelt down by her, took one of her hands in his, and asked, with quivering voice,—

"Tell me, child, what is your name?"

"Magdalen," was the reply.

A cry of anguish escaped from the unhappy soldier. He exclaimed, as in despair, "Magdalen! Heavens! it's not she!"

And tears gushed from his eyes and he covered his face with both hands. The lieutenant would have raised him from the ground; but with a wave of the hand he gently refused the offered assistance.

Magdalen looked first at one, then at the other, of the two men, and then observed that he that was kneeling by her wept bitterly. Seizing his hand, and in a tone of the deepest sympathy, she spoke:—

"Ah, sir, what is it makes you so sad? I

haven't said any thing to hurt you. Or is it the tune I was just singing that you can't bear to hear? If that's it, I'm sure I won't sing it any more."

These few words affected the colonel deeply. Suddenly he dashed the tears from his eyes, edged still nearer to her than before, and asked, anxiously and hastily,—

"But tell me, child, who was it taught you that tune?"

"I don't know," was the answer, in a low voice. "I have known it a long, long time,—as long as I can remember any thing."

"Do you remember, when you were quite a little girl, often hearing a great noise,—a noise of smiths' hammers?"

Magdalen made no reply, but her eyes opened wider, and she passed her hand thoughtfully over her fair open forehead, as seeking to recall a memory.

"Listen," pursued the colonel, still more hastily, still more anxiously; "listen, now, whether you haven't often heard a noise like this." And with the handle of his riding-whip he beat time in his hand to the usual measure of a smith's hammer, and at the same time sang—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
Strike while it's hot,
And tarry not.
Again, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

And ever as he went on, a deeper and a deeper thrill passed through her, till, as he closed, she cried out, in a transport of delight,—

"Yes! yes! Ricketicketack!"

And she beat the selfsame measure in her hand.

"Now, my child, do you remember a man's dancing and riding you upon his knee to that tune?"

She put her forefinger to her lips and shut her eyes. After a moment of silence, she said, half aloud, and, as it were, doubtfully,—

"The man—the man was—my father."

The colonel trembled in every limb; he was on the point of opening his arms to clasp her to him; still, he held back for one more question.

"But now tell me again, child; was your name Magdalen then? Can you recollect what the man that danced you on his knee used to call you?"

She cast down her eyes, and for a while seemed lost in thought. At last, slowly, and syllable by syllable, she replied,—

"He called me his dear—dear—dear Monica."

"My child! my child!" cried the colonel, in a voice that might have been heard all over the heath. Monica lay on his bosom.

She looked up to him with her dark eyes; she smiled sweetly upon him. At last, overpowered by her feelings, she would have fallen to the ground had not his arm supported her.

And so they set out, she leaning on him, and followed the road, making a stand every now and

then, till the farm-house came into distant view on the right, and they could proceed no farther without beginning to leave it behind. Certainly it was far enough from the colonel's thoughts to set foot in the house where his daughter had suffered so much; especially he shrank from coming in contact with the brutal mistress who had falsified the poor child's name in order to appropriate the casket with its contents. Accordingly, when they arrived at this point he drew Monica on with a hurried step, and endeavored, by questions and manifestations of affection, to divert her attention from the farm. And from this we may conclude that she had already told him all, and how it would be with a heavy heart that she would part from the peasant-lad who had ever so faithfully cared for her and protected her as a brother. However much good Monica had told her father of Jan, he could not but feel a secret repugnance for the son of her tormentor, and would have been much better pleased to break away without more ado from so unpleasant a set of associations.

But, spite of her father's precautions, Monica suddenly tore herself from his arms, turned toward the farm, and stood motionless and speechless.

The colonel left her a moment to her emotion, which he interpreted as a farewell to all her recollections of the past; but when he saw her eyes filled with tears he could not help throwing in a word.

"Dear Monica, how can you grieve at leaving a house where you have suffered so much wrong?"

"Ah, he'll die!" she sighed out.

"Not he, child. I don't doubt he'll miss you at first; but he'll soon be comforted and forget you."

A sudden flash lighted up Monica's eyes.

"Forget me!" cried she. "Forget his sister! Never, never! Ah, could I but see him once again! Ah! there he is! Jan! Jan!"

And, like a hunted deer, she darted over the heath toward the young peasant, whom she had seen in the distance passing among the alder-bushes. With open arms she threw herself upon him, but not gladly; there was rather a tone of deep suffering in her voice as she spoke:—

"Jan, I'm going away—far, far from here."

The youth regarded her with an astonished air, and seemed not to understand her; but she pointed over the heath, and added,—

"See, there, behind me comes my father; it was of him that the voice within me used to speak."

The lad started as in terror, and his knees failed under him as the colonel met his eye. He seemed in a moment to comprehend his misfortune in its whole extent. From the father he turned his troubled eye on Monica, laid a convulsive hold on the stem of an alder that grew by, and leaned his head and shoulder against

it. Monica understood what he was suffering; she threw her arms round his neck, gently lifted his head from the tree, and, for the first time in her life, pressed a glowing kiss upon his forehead, while the tears trickled down his cheeks.

"Jan! Jan!" she cried, "my kind brother, don't do so! I'll come and see you again."

This evidence of her affection somewhat appeased the youth's grief. He looked upon her with a more quiet sorrow, she still with one arm round his neck, till the colonel's arrival checked the threatened outpouring of their mutual feelings. He saw in all this nothing but the attachment of two children who had grown up together, and smiled kindly upon them. Coming up, he took the lad by the hand.

"Jan van Dael," he said, "I thank you for all the kindness you have shown my child. If ever you are in want of a protector, my son, you shall find one in me. We are now going to Moll. Don't be sorry for your sister Monica's good fortune: that would not be right of you. Come as soon as you can and see us at Moll, at the Eagle; there we can spend some time together. Meanwhile, I must make you a little——"

And with these words he slipped several gold-pieces into Jan's hand, who, however, instead of thanking him, rather cast on him an evil eye, and did not even seem conscious of what had occurred.

"Come along, Monica," continued the colonel,

turning to his daughter, "we must make haste. For the present you and Jan may be comforted; you will have time enough together in Moll."

With tears in her eyes, Monica pressed Jan's hand, and slowly turned away, repeating, as she went,—

"Good-by till then, Jan! Good-by till then."

The lad cast down his eyes, and for a while stood motionless. When he looked up again, the colonel and his daughter had long since disappeared behind the alders. Now, for the first time, Jan felt something heavy in his hand: he regarded the pieces of gold with a contemptuous smile, and flung them from him far away over the heath. Then he sank down at the foot of the tree and hid his face in his hands.

CHAPTER V.

YET another hour, and the sun will shed his rays over the heath. He is already rising; in the east the dawn is breaking; a low, mysterious buzz announces already nature's awakening.

In the little chamber of the solitary farm-house the old clock ticks steadily on in the dead stillness of the night, which else reigns there undisturbed: the hearth is cold.

In the half-dark corner stands a spinning-wheel, the rock of finely-dressed flax still in it, the thread still unbroken, as though just left there by the spinner.

Two or three steps from it we may discern the indefinite outline of a human figure: it is that of a young man, who sits and regards the spinning-wheel with a peculiar expression. His arms are folded on his breast; his head is bowed; his eye wanders from the wheel to the chair by it, and from the chair back to the wheel. His countenance bears the stamp of deep affliction; his eyes glow with a stifled fire, as though despair were fast seated in his heart; and yet from time to time a smile wanders over his lips. One that saw him so sitting there might well think that a form in-

visible to other eyes sat at the wheel, with whom he was mutely conversing through the medium of looks. Low tones—so low that they do not break the stillness of the night—float through the chamber; the young man lays his finger on his lips and seems to listen, though it is himself that is unconsciously singing:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo.
The iron's warm
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

Now he rises from his seat, takes a stick from the corner, and slowly leaves the room. Dreamily wandering, he skirts the alders, and pulls to pieces sprigs of heather, with a strange smile. Arrived at the margin of the road, he casts a look toward the little hills which are seen not far off; his eyes fill with tears; he sits down and weeps bitterly.

After a few moments he rises again and approaches the lofty beech-tree, beside which low bushes of juniper wave to and fro in the morning breeze. There he stands, unconscious of his own existence, and listens as though a secret voice were speaking to him from the tree. A low song bubbles up, as it were, from his bosom, and drops, word by word, from his lips:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo.

The iron's warm ;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

But now that dream has its end too. He leaves the beech, and makes his way, with long strides, over the heath. He climbs a sandy hillock ; on the top he firmly plants his long staff before him, and, half standing, half leaning on it, there he remains, fixed and motionless as a statue. His eye is fixed upon a bluish point in the distance, from which the serpentine road winds over the heath till it disappears near the hillock on which he is standing.

What can it be that he is looking out for? What is he hoping for, that the road over the heath can bring to him? To whom does the morning breeze carry the sighs which so painfully burst from his bosom?

Listen! you may hear it from himself, for the sigh becomes a word,—a name uttered in mingled love and pain :—

"Magdalen!—Monica!"

And now a peasant-girl mounts the hill from behind him, and, as soon as she is near enough, calls angrily to him,—

"Jan, you're wanted in the house!"

He starts up, and casts on her a bitter look; but in the same instant his features resume their calmness, nay, even apathy, and he descends the hillock, merely saying,—

"Very well, sister; I'm coming."

And he followed her homeward, hanging down his head, while she went on in the same tone:—

"This is a fine way of going on, isn't it? Plague on your nonsense! I suppose you think you can earn your bread with dreaming all day! For the last three months you've been just as great a natural as that lazy Magdalen, that's gone away with her father, as the folks say. I suppose you've learnt all this pretty stuff from her. Wet or dry, there you are from morning to night, on the sand-hill, gaping after the crows. I should be ashamed of myself. There's our poor mother sick in bed, and you thinking of nothing but your own silly dreams! I suppose you mean to bring the farm to the dogs, us to the workhouse, and yourself to Gheel!"*

To all these reproaches Jan made no answer; indeed, he did not seem even to hear them. He let his sister talk on without showing the least sign of annoyance, and followed her quietly to the house.

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* A village in the neighborhood, where there is a public lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER VI.

One afternoon, Jan stood again by the beech-tree. He looked weak and wasted; the fresh red of his cheeks had given way to an ashy transparent paleness; his eyes had lost all expression, and his head hung down listlessly on his left shoulder.

Already had he stood thus more than half an hour without moving, when behind him, among the alders, a step rustled in the fallen leaves. He turned round: there stood the old parish priest of Desschel. With an evident effort he threw a more cheerful expression into his countenance, and bowed respectfully to the clergyman; he even attempted to smile, but in a way that only witnessed the more of his internal suffering.

The priest sat down on the grass, and with a gesture invited Jan to take a seat beside him; then he took the young man by the hand, looked him compassionately in the face, and in a tone of true fatherly feeling thus began:—

"Jan! Jan! is this the way you keep your solemn promise? Still always under the beech-tree! You will have it, then, that your mother

must do as she has threatened, and cut the tree down?"

At these words a convulsive start passed through Jan's limbs; he darted an indignant look upon the priest, and cried out,—

"What! cut the tree down!—the beech-tree! I'd smash the workmen's skulls in."

This outbreak astonished the good pastor not a little; he was in hopes that his reiterated admonitions had already in great part subdued Jan's grief, and that the poor fellow had by this time half forgotten the cause of it. In the same paternal tone he added,—

"Jan, my son, those are sinful words of yours. What your mother said about the tree is not exactly to be taken for gospel; but that you, with your right feeling and good understanding, should let yourself be led away by an empty nothing, a foolish dream, to think of murder and threaten it, is what I can't understand, and it grieves me more than I can tell you. Tell me: do I deserve that you should answer me so?"

"Forgive me," said Jan, repentantly; "I know that you desire nothing of me but what is for my good; but there is something in my heart which I cannot account for even to myself, and which is stronger than your words and my will."

"Hear, Jan: it is written, 'He that loveth danger shall perish therein;' and so it is with you, my lad. If, instead of giving yourself up to dreams, and so wasting health and strength, you

were to work as you used to do, and as it's your duty to do, you'd soon forget all about this grief of yours; you'd be well in body and cheerful in mind, and be able to be a help and support to your sick mother. But now you waste your time in idling under the tree here, or else upon the sand-hill; and so not only you make a great sinner of yourself, by neglecting your duty toward God and your mother, but a great fool too, for tormenting yourself with hankering after impossible things, and throwing away your whole life upon an idle dream."

"Ah, well! I did work on for a long time after she left, and only came here out of work hours. I did hope then that I should forget her, but the thought of her followed me everywhere. While I was at the plough I heard her name; the flails beat time to Ricketicketack; and every name that was called sounded like Monica. It did me no good working; and I didn't know what I was about; 'twas all of no use. In my sleep it was the same thing over again. I used to see her and talk with her, and so I had comfort, but I had no rest. Now, with all the good-will in the world, I can't work; I'm weak and ill."

The good priest shook his head, and for a while remained silent; at last he once more took the lad's hand, and resumed:—

"Now, Jan, you must tell me whether you mean this to go on so, or not. It is quite certain, and that you know well enough, that Monica will not

come back; and, if she did, that would only make the matter worse; she's a rich young lady now, and you are a little farmer's son, and just fit for a little farmer yourself. All this, therefore, is mere idleness and folly."

"But how can I forget her, then, father?"

"Do you really and honestly wish it?"

"I do; from my inmost soul I wish it, for now my very dreams are bitter to me, and my heart is full of despair."

"Well, then, show once for all that you have a will, and really desire to come to your senses. Follow your mother's wish and my advice. Go into the seminary at Mechlin."

"I should die there, father."

"Why so?"

"Why so? A few months ago I was obliged to spend a week at Brussels, and all that time I did nothing but weep! Ah! how I did suffer!"

"I don't understand you, Jan."

"Well, I'll tell you, then. As soon as I was able to get away, I set off and walked on, day and night, without stopping. The first puff of wind that came to me with the smell of the heather-peat seemed to me like a new breath; at the first fir-tree I threw myself on my knees and thanked God that he had brought me back to my own old trees again; the first bit of heather I saw, I swallowed it out of pure delight; and the moment I got here I ran off to the beech-tree, with my eyes full of tears, and began talking to the juniper-

bushes as though they had understood me. And now you want me to be six whole years away! I could never bear it."

"My son, I know well enough the reason why you above all others love the heath-land; but this reason why is just what we want you cured of. Headwork will do more than bodily labor to drive the image that haunts you from your mind, and consciousness of being destined to be set apart for the service of God will help you to subdue all these foolish dreams. Other reflections I might propose to you, well suited to bring you to a better frame of mind. Do you think it's any thing else than self-murder, your fretting yourself to death in this way? And do you think that if you really persist in such sinful folly, to the destruction of your body here, it can ever be well with your soul hereafter? In your idle dreamy existence you think on only one subject, and that an earthly one; no thought of any thing higher, no reflection on heavenly things, finds room in your heart; you never pray, unless you call it praying repeating a form of words with your lips while in very truth you are casting scorn on God by worshipping a mortal image even in his holy place."

These words, spoken in a tone of the most serious earnestness, made a deep impression on poor Jan's feelings. They were terrible truths that his good pastor had spoken to him, and his inmost soul was shaken. For a while he stood

speechless, staring into vacancy. At last he raised his head, and spoke as one taking a sudden resolve:—

"Well, then, father, I will go to Mechlin."

"To-morrow?" asked the rector, well pleased at his success.

"What! to-morrow?" replied Jan, half terrified; "to-morrow, and forever?"

"My good Jan, what nonsense you talk! You can pay your mother a visit more than once in the year, and the vacations will give you time enough for wandering about on your darling heath. And then, if you come to be ordained, you may get appointed to one of the villages about here, and pass your life peacefully in the midst of it. So, you'll go to-morrow, won't you?"

"Well, then, to-morrow; so be it!" cried the poor fellow, so sharply that the thicket rang with it. "To-morrow! to-morrow!"

Half an hour later the rector was gently leading him home by the hand.

CHAPTER VII.

Monica had accompanied her father to France. She had left her native district with her heart full of sorrowful regret for him who on his side was mourning and suffering for her; but her father's tenderness, and his efforts to divert her, succeeded after a time in banishing sadness both from her heart and countenance. The tumult of the great world and its ceaseless round of pleasures threw the recollections of her former life more and more into the background; and, while she did not entirely forget the solitary farm-house and him who had been her protector and brother there, her thoughts of them were both less frequent and less intense.

At Paris she had been put into the hands of the best teachers; and, being gifted with rapid apprehension and encouraged by her father's interest in her progress, in the space of four years she had acquired all the accomplishments necessary for her figuring on an equal footing in good society.

Thus Monica's pale cheeks had soon gained color; her health improved, the symptoms of decline disappeared, and she grew visibly in strength and vigor. One soon becomes habituated

to any thing, and soonest of all to good fortune. So it was with Monica. For a whole year she took pleasure in every thing; balls and entertainments of all kinds followed one another incessantly; ever more and more she entered into the spirit of the world and desired its applause.

But this state of mind did not last long with her. From time to time old remembrances flitted over her spirits, and in the course of the second year she seemed again possessed by a spirit of silent revery. Amid all the festive tumult, the crash of music and the blaze of lights, she would seem absent and insensible to what was passing, as though some secret and absorbing thought pursued her everywhere. At first this revulsion of feeling was but weak: she would often acknowledge to her father that she had been thinking of the open heath, with its one stately beech and waving junipers; she would tell him how plainly she saw them before her, and at the same time would laugh and jest over her dream-plague, as she called it.

Did the images of her dream ever show her among the thicket the poor Jan who was mourning for her so unceasingly? Who knows? At all events, she did not acknowledge it even to herself, much less to another.

By degrees, meanwhile, a distaste to these diversions came over her; she now only frequented them when she could no longer evade her father's solicitations; an inclination for solitude grew upon

her. At times her lips would move involuntarily, and without any thought of hers the long-forgotten tune would hover on them. Again the color left her cheeks; again she grew thin and sickly, —so much so that the poor father began to fear he should lose her again and forever. A skilful physician whom he consulted recommended marriage as the best and only means of cure, and assured him she would infallibly soon be herself again could she only be prevailed upon to enter into this view. Forthwith the colonel bethought him of his trusty comrade the lieutenant, and took not a little trouble to turn Monica's thoughts that way. He found her by no means insensible to his young friend's attentions and good qualities, but love for him there was none in her; her heart remained cold as ice toward him. This grieved the father sadly; he saw his sole resource failing him,—that upon which all his hopes of saving his child were staked. Daily now he would exhaust his ingenuity to find out from her what she desired, what he could do to please her, what it could be that set her mind ill at ease; she only answered she was not ill, and generally contrived to put an end to his questioning by caresses or similar artifices. All that he could get out of her was that she had an earnest longing after the heaths of Brabant; in fact, that she was in a manner homesick.

More than once he had promised her a long visit to the moor of Kempen, that her health

might be restored by the genial influence of her native air; but the rapid thickening of the events of the war ever and again prevented the accomplishment of this project.

At last, toward the end of 1813, by ceaseless solicitation, the colonel had obtained from the Minister of the War Department the promise of a three months' leave of absence for the next spring. The thought of revisiting the scenes of her youth seemed to give new life to Monica. But soon there came news of disaster from the North; nearly the whole of the French army had perished by the enemy and the elements, and no one could foresee what might be the consequences of this defeat. One universal shudder had come upon the soldiers left behind in France at the terrible news. The colonel could not conceal all this from Monica, and she saw only too well that her visit to her dear Kempen was now indefinitely postponed.

Meanwhile, the Emperor suddenly returned without his army, and a decree of the Senate appeared, by which 350,000 young men were called into arms. At the same time, the colonel received orders to join the army in Germany with his regiment. He had only time to place his daughter under proper care at Paris, and, ill as she was, tore himself from her, to follow Napoleon over the Rhine.

Six months afterward, he received a shot in the knee at Dresden, which, though he recovered,

left him seriously lame for life. His wish to return to Paris was now readily complied with. There he found Monica still thinner than he had left her, with her old transparent paleness and watery eyes, listless, and given up to her dreams.

In her heart only two chords remained which were not wholly unstrung,—her love to him and to her native scenes.

The colonel immediately made all preparations for returning with Monica to Brabant. A suitable house had already been taken and furnished for them at Antwerp. His view for the future was to purchase or rent a country-place in the neighborhood of Moll; but that he did not deem expedient at present, while the war was still raging.

A few days, and they set out for their destination. Nothing occurred to disturb them on their glad return till they had actually reached Antwerp and were approaching the door of their new abode. Then, as Monica was accidentally looking from the carriage-window, she suddenly gave a loud cry, as of alarm, which made the colonel start from his seat in affright.

To his questions as to the cause, she only replied,—

"It's nothing, father; I saw a poor fellow in the street so wretchedly dressed, and yet with such expression in his eyes! But it's over now; I'm quite quiet again."

CHAPTER VIII.

Six weeks had elapsed since the colonel's arrival at Antwerp.

In the garret of a small house, in a little back street, sat, early one evening, an old woman, working lace by candlelight. Every thing about her had a thoroughly poverty-stricken air; for she lived under the bare roof, and for furniture had neither more nor less than a small table, two miserable chairs, and a bed, the covering of which was made up of all kinds of rags and fragments quilted together. Ever and anon, while she mechanically plied the bobbins, she bowed her ear toward a sort of partition, behind which the bed stood, and seemed to listen to a scarcely audible sound.

At one of these moments, while her hands rested for an instant on the cushion, the door of the little room opened, and another woman entered. The first laid her finger on her lips, and with a whispered "Hush!" imposed silence on the new-comer, whom she then took by the hand and led to the table with as little noise as possible. Then she gave her visitor one of the chairs, cautiously sat down in the other herself, and at last whispered,—

"Make as little noise as you can, Kate,—there's a good soul; he's in such a nice sleep."

Kate produced a piece of knitting from her pocket, and answered, just as noiselessly,—

"Haha, that's the young fellow you took in. You did a good deed on him, Granny* Teerlinck, if it's true what the people say."

"Well, Kate, this I can tell you:—that but for me the poor fellow would be dead and buried."

Meanwhile, Kate had been closely scanning every corner of the little garret; at last she recommenced:—

"But, granny, if I remember, you've had the lad here in your room for five or six weeks: where do you sleep yourself, then?"

"Ay, indeed, Kate, where do I sleep! why, here in the corner, with my head on the table. There's not much left to spoil in me; I've had my day, wench."

"But—Lord bless us!—how can you hold out in that way? Six weeks without going to bed! It's enough to kill you, granny!"

"Well, Kate, we can but give our neighbor what we have. The rich folk give their money, and I—well, I give what I have too, my bed and my night's rest."

"Well, granny, I must tell you, that's more than I could do; but well done it is, and you're

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* A familiar form of address to old women among the Flemish people.

earning yourself a seat in heaven by it, sure enough, granny. But I don't know now just how it all happened; one says this and another that, and in the end one can make neither head nor tail of it, and is just as wise as at first. How was it all, now? just tell me, granny."

"Well, that I'll tell you, Kate; only come a little closer,—we might wake him, poor fellow. It's five or six weeks ago now, it was on a Saturday, and eleven o'clock at night, sure enough;—well, I'd cooked a good supper for my cat, and, as I hadn't seen her at home all the afternoon, I took my peterkin* and went out behind there, toward the dead wall, where the carts and carriages stand, to see if I could find the witch there. Well, while I was spying about there, and calling out 'Puss! puss!' what should I hear but something groan—just like a Christian, as it might be. It made me give such a jump! Well, I looked on the ground, where I thought it came from, and there—good heavens! I can't tell you how frighted I was—there lies a man on his back, with his face covered with blood."

"Covered with blood, do you say?"

"Yes, Kate, covered with blood. Well, just think now. I ran to the neighbors; they soon brought a light, and then we found that it was a young fellow that had most likely fallen asleep on a market-cart, and so tumbled off. He must

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* A little metal lamp.

have been lying there a good while, for the blood was all clotted hard."

"And he was dead? eh, granny?"

"Dead, you goose, and he asleep there in my bed?"

"Ah, well, granny, one hasn't always one's wits about one; well, one can't help that. Now —and what did they do then?"

"Ah, yes, what did they do? Why, just as they always do, Kate. A deal of talk and nothing done; and all the while there lay the poor fellow in his blood on the cold stones: my heart was ready to break over him. Well, then, I said to myself, 'In God's name, we're all brothers and sisters after all;' and so I didn't wait till the doctor came to send him off to the hospital, but I bade the people take him up and put him here in my bed."

"But, granny, how have you managed to keep him and do for him all this while? Ah! you must have an old stocking hid somewhere, I see."

"No, Kate, I've worked hard, and gone a little on trust; but that doesn't signify; what's given with good heart the Lord gives us back."

"Well, that is a story! Do you know at all who his people are, granny, and where he comes from?"

"I've never asked him about that; but when the fever goes to his head then he talks out in his dreams, and so I know that his father and mother are both dead."

"And he hasn't said any thing else that you could notice?"

"No! he comes out with a deal that I can't make head nor tail of, about a beech-tree, and a heath, and fir-woods. Sometimes he'll talk Latin; and sometimes he calls, 'Monica! Monica!' That's his mother's or sister's name, I take it. But there's a tune he has——well, I'd give a groat you could hear that; it's something about Ricketicketack, and enough to set you dancing. But the best of all is, he's always talking as though they had wanted to make him a priest; so one day I managed to get a look at his head, to see if they'd shaved a bit there, but never a razor had come on his curly poll, I'll be bound."

"Ah! it's some poor fellow that had got too much to drink, and now he's lost his wits."

"What! lost his wits, Kate? Lost his wits? I wish you could hear him! you'd go on your knees to him. He speaks like a book; our curate's best sermons are nothing to him. There hang his clothes, Kate; just see what fine cloth it is. Every time he opens his mouth to thank me the tears come into my eyes, and it's as though an angel was speaking to me. I tell you, Kate, I'm fonder of him than if he was my own child; and if he'd stay with me I'd be glad to work for him till my death's day. Ah, Kate, he always calls me mother; you should only just hear him."

"Well, but how's it going with him now? Does he get better?"

"Well, yes. For a whole month he was quite out of himself, quite light-headed with fever; but for the last week he's been better. He gets on but slowly, and his memory only comes back by degrees, but else he's quite in his right mind. If he liked talking a little better, I should know more; but he never says a word, except that he thanks me a hundred thousand times over; and I never ask him a word. His name is Jan—that he told me yesterday; and the rest will all come, I dare say, Kate, when he's once a little better; now he's as thin as a lath and as white as a night-cap. The first time he got up he was so weak that I was obliged to take him in my arms, or he'd have fallen of a heap, like a wet cloth."

"Ah! the poor fellow!"

"Well, as I said, he's much better now; he can walk pretty well, and yesterday he said, of his own accord, he'd go out this evening to get a little fresh air."

Hardly were the words out of Granny Teerlinck's mouth when a voice was heard from behind the partition, calling out, in a soft, low tone,—

"Mother! good mother!"

Both the words and the tone in which they were spoken seemed to have a magic effect on the old woman's feelings; her eyes overflowed with deep emotion as she approached the bed, the lamp in one hand and a cup of milk-and-water in the other.

Her patient looked up at her with such an ex-

pression of love and gratitude, that she turned away to wipe a tear from her eye. Meanwhile, the young man seized one of her hands, and impressed a long kiss on it.

"Good mother!" he repeated.

Kate made as long a neck as she could to get a look at the sick man; she started in every limb when he turned his hollow eye upon her, and pushed her chair hastily back, as though shrinking from some terrible apparition.

The young man threw his thin arm round his old nurse's neck, and drew her toward him. Probably he whispered something in her ear, for she immediately brought him his clothes, laid them on the bed, and then drew the tattered curtain. This done, she returned to the table, and whispered in a low but delighted tone to the terrified Kate,—

"He's getting up!"

These words did not seem to afford much satisfaction to the visitor, for she turned pale and looked anxiously toward the door. Evidently she was nervously desirous to be clear out of the room, while her female curiosity urged her to keep her seat. The latter prevailed.

In a few moments the curtain was drawn back. The old woman hastened up to her patient, helped him out of bed, and supported him to the table, on which he leaned.

Can this walking skeleton be the young peasant whom we have seen? Yes, he it is, poor fellow! His bones seem as though they would force their

way through the colorless skin; his eyes are sunk deep in their sockets; his figure is bent double; his head hangs on one side. His clothes, dirty and coarsely patched, are only fit for a beggar.

Now he stands before the good old granny, and holds one of her hands in his. He looks at her with the tender expression that belongs to a loving child. At last he speaks:—

"Good mother, I should be glad to go out; but I'm afraid you won't like it."

"Why, Jan, my lad," answered the old woman, "you're so sadly weak, my poor lamb! you might so easily fall and get a mischief; you can't think what a fright I should be in the mean while."

The old woman's anxiety was so plainly written on every feature of her countenance, that Jan's inmost soul was moved.

"Ah, mother," he sighed out, "why are you so fond of me? Ah, yes; indeed you are my guardian angel. What no one could do, that your love has done. What wonderful goodness of soul there must be in you! On the very brink of the grave you've enough of the spirit of tenderness left in you to sweeten life for an unhappy creature like me, and to bring him back out of the very pit of despair. How I have prayed to God to bless you! It was my first prayer for these seven years that has had no other thought mixed with it."

The young man's speech had gradually acquired a tone of enthusiasm which quite carried Kate

away. Her nervous terror disappeared. With gaping mouth and open eyes she listened to the words, each one of which touched and transported her. The old dame threw an inquiring look on her, as if to ask,—

"Now, what do you think of my lad? Is he out of his wits?"

But Kate listened on without a word, even long after Jan had ceased to speak.

"Poor fellow!" sighed his old nurse. "But keep a good heart! I'm old and worn out, and know nothing; but if you'll stay with me I'll always love you, and my old fingers shall work for you."

Jan took her hand and put it to his lips, but otherwise made no answer.

"Jan," she went on, "if you'd like to go out, say so; and don't stay in on my account. I'll go with you."

"Good mother," said he, in a tone of entreaty, "I should like to go out: but I must go alone; my head burns, and I feel as if being quite alone would do me good. To-morrow, good mother, I'll tell you who I am, and all about me. Now let me go, and do you stay quietly at home; I shall be back in an hour."

The old woman gave Jan her crutch-headed stick, led him down the stairs, spoke a few more words of kindness to him, and shut the door.

There he goes now, with unsteady foot, through the darkness; he keeps close to the houses, leans

on the crutched stick, and pants with weariness. Certainly his walk has some definite object, for he never hesitates a moment in choosing his way. Now and then he stops and rests a while, then goes on again, and so at last he arrives at the Place de Meir. There he keeps still closer along the walls of the houses, and proceeds still more slowly; you might almost take him for a thief or a spy. And now he stops under the closed windows of a handsome house, leans his elbows on the stone window-sill of the ground-floor, and endeavors to peep through the interstices of the Venetian shutters. There is light in the house; a beam of it falls on his face, while for very weariness he sinks against the wall, and helplessly leans his head on the stone.

CHAPTER IX.

In the handsome saloon at the window of which Jan was watching were two persons. Colonel van Milgem sat by the marble hearth, in a velvet-covered arm-chair, and seemed to be deeply busied with some thought, so intently were his eyes fixed upon the carpet. By a table, on which lay various silver implements of female work, sat a young lady, occupying herself with stringing beads. Her face was pale, and bore on it all the signs of a long and wearing illness; the marble fairness of her complexion was still further enhanced by the raven-black locks, which on the slightest movement seemed affectionately to caress her cheeks. After a long silence, she began to hum the burden of her favorite tune. This seemed not exactly to please the colonel. At last he shook his head with an air of annoyance, and said,—

"Don't be always at that tune, Monica; it only feeds your melancholy, and you know it makes me quite sad."

"What! was I singing it again?" said Monica, in surprise. "I didn't know it, father. Forgive me for being so absent."

"Well, will the purse soon be ready?" now inquired the colonel. "Poor Adolph! how pleased he'll be at the present—he that loves you so!"

"Where is he now?"

"That's hard to say. Who knows? Perhaps in the hospital somewhere or another; if, indeed, a bullet hasn't already made an end of him."

"Oh, father, father! you make me tremble."

"What! do you tremble for him? You do care for him, then?"

"To be sure I do,—as my brother."

"Ah, Monica, you must care for him more than that. And he deserves it in every way. He's a handsome young fellow, with every thing in him to please a woman; and, besides that, it was he that saved your father's life at Dresden. Even if love can't find the way to your heart, I should think that mere gratitude might make you willing to follow my advice, and my entreaty too, and to reward him for his love and generous self-devotion."

"Look at me, father. What have I to give Adolph? My real love is all set on you; I have no heart for him, then. Shall I marry him to make him unhappy with coldness and indifference? Surely a husband asks more of his wife than mere friendship. But, besides, I feel an invincible disinclination to a tie that would deprive me of my liberty."

"Of what liberty, Monica? The liberty to dream and brood over you know not what?

Would to heaven you might lose this liberty, which only wears and wastes you. Do but see, my child, what a happy life it will be for you, when we take possession of our estate at Moll, if you have a friend who can wander over the heath with you, visit the beech-tree and the brook with you; and to both of us he will be a companion in our solitude, which without love is dead and cold: the heart soon dries up without the dew which only another can shed upon it."

"That may all be true, father, but Adolph is no son of the heath. He would never understand the speech of the grasshoppers; no fir-tree shaded the plays of his youth, and the ocean-like immensity of the open moor would seem mere monotony to him that is a child of the mountain. Ah, father, confess it; between me and my darling heath he would stand but as a stranger!"

Monica's words fell unpleasantly on the colonel's ear; his countenance clouded over, and, turning to his daughter,—

"Monica, my child," he said, in a more serious tone, "have then your father's wishes no weight at all with you? For years I have been Adolph's earnest advocate with you, have done every thing to bring you together, and still you refuse it me to join your lot with his. But why? Only that you may give up your whole soul to a dream that is killing you. You say that it is because you do not love him; well, then, he does not ask of you to love him."

Monica stared on her father as in amazement.

"Not ask of me to love him? What does he ask of me, then?"

Still more seriously and impressively the colonel went on:—"You compel me, Monica, to speak of things which should else never have passed my lips. For years past, my Monica, you have been hastening toward the grave, which, in truth, you are digging for yourself. I cannot look on you, my darling only child, without beholding the image of death at your side waiting to seize you. For years my heart has been tormented with the fear of losing you. This sword hanging over my head is wearing out my life too; it keeps me in a state of suffering which I cannot describe. I have opened my anxious heart to Adolph: I have told him that there is but one way of rescuing you from your dark broodings and an early death. I have myself besought him, entreated him, to become a suitor for your heart and hand. He had already saved the father's life; he took upon him to save the child's too, and to this end broke off other ties; he gave up the cherished hope of living with his old mother among his beloved mountains, to follow us to the barren heath. This he has done for your sake, that he may be your guardian angel watching over you to drive away the evil spirit that threatens you. And can all this, Monica, awaken no more in you than mere commonplace gratitude?

Is every chord in your heart dumb, that so the only answer you can give me is 'No'?"

Monica was deeply moved, and showed it plainly enough on her countenance.

"Father," at last she replied, "I have been ungrateful toward Adolph and toward you: that I acknowledge with deep sorrow. But what is it you ask of me? Do you not see that what you desire is to destroy all my remembrances of the past? If I consent to become Adolph's wife, I cannot then but give him a prominent place in my heart; ungrateful I cannot be: I must repay his generosity with tenderness and affection, even if I cannot give him passionate love. But then I should have to give up every thing that remains to me from my former life, and——"

The colonel's eyes lighted up joyfully; he seized Monica's hand.

"Dear child," said he, "that is the very thing; you must give up your dreams to save your life. Tell me that you accept Adolph as your future husband; make me quite happy. My dearest child, say, I beg of you, say yes! tell me that you accept him!"

In evident agitation, Monica answered not; her head sank upon her breast.

"My child, my child!" pursued the colonel, "don't leave me any longer in uncertainty; say yes; do!"

Slowly she raised her eyes, and replied,—

"Well, then, father, if it will make you happy,"——

But at this moment a sudden shudder came over her; she raised her finger, and seemed listening, in an agony of attention, to some low or distant sound.

"What's the matter with you?" cried the colonel, in astonishment.

"Hark! hark!" replied she, with a rapturous smile.

And now the tones came nearer, and the colonel heard them too.

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
The iron's warm;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

He knew the power of that snatch of song upon Monica's feelings; now it sounded to him as though thrown at him in scorn of his humble origin. In high wrath he pulled the bell, stamping at the same time with his foot upon the floor.

"I will know who it is that ventures to insult me here!" cried he.

A servant came. The colonel went on:—

"There's some insolent fellow singing outside; take the other men with you and bring him in; I'll see who the fellow is. If he resists, use force."

"Father!" cried Monica, beseechingly, "what's that you say? Use force? How do you know against whom?"

"We shall see," replied the colonel, in high indignation.

Monica returned to her work-table, and sat down with sufficiently mournful feelings.

CHAPTER X.

The outer door was heard to open and shut again. Presently a servant appeared in the saloon:—

"It's nothing but a poor beggar, colonel, so weak and ill that he can hardly put one foot before the other. The poor fellow thought little enough of resisting; he's there in the passage: hadn't we better let him go again?"

"No, no," cried the colonel; "I'll get to the bottom of this; there's something behind. Why are you in such a tremble, Monica? Do you know this beggar? Bring him in."

Hardly had the poor lad, with hanging head and downcast eyes, set his foot on the threshold, when Monica, with a loud cry, ran up to him, seized his hand, and exclaimed,—

"Heavens! Jan! is that you?"

"Yes, 'tis I," he answered, without lifting up his eyes.

The colonel stood a while in silence, rubbing his forehead, as though a sudden suspicion had arisen in him. It must soon have vanished, however, for he took Jan kindly by the arm, led him up to one of the high-backed velvet

chairs, and made him sit down in it. Monica had never let go the hand she had taken; she too continued to look straight before her without speaking.

The colonel returned to his seat.

"Jan van Dael," he began, "how's this? Why didn't you think of me when you were in trouble? Didn't I tell you that I would at all times help you and stand by you? And now what misery you've fallen to! But be easy; from this time you shall want for nothing. Take heart; I'm not ungrateful, and I've a great debt to pay you."

With these words, he went to a secretaire, took out a handful of Napoleons, laid them on a card-table by Jan, and went on:—

"See, my dear friend; this is no alms that I'm offering you, but a little return for what you formerly did for my Monica. I beg you will accept this from me as your friend."

Jan turned his sunk eyes from the table where the gold lay to the colonel, and with a sad smile said,—

"Money! ever money, and nothing but money!"

Then, with a look at his ragged clothes, he added,—

"And yet money might stand me in some stead too; I could get me some clothes, and do something for the poor old woman that's done so much for me. But you must spare me that, colonel; I couldn't take money from you if I could buy off death with it."

In speaking these words, Jan made a motion with his hand which withdrew it from the hold that Monica still kept on it. The poor girl tottered to her chair, and sat down in silence, her eyes still fixed on the youth.

"But, Jan, my friend," proceeded the colonel, "you are unjust both to yourself and me. If you won't take money from me, tell me how else I can help you. It will make me happy if you will point out to me any way in which I can serve you; and if you will do so, I shall feel that you are only adding to the reasons I have to be grateful to you."

"You wish to do me a service?" replied Jan. "Well, then, I will ask a favor of you; will you grant it me?"

"Speak, Jan; I will do whatever you ask of me. What is it you wish?"

The young man raised himself in his chair, and spoke:—

"Colonel, to-morrow I am about to begin a new life, and mean to place an impassable barrier between my past and my future. It is not so easy to tear oneself loose from recollections that have grown fast into heart and brain,—that make a part, and no little one, of our very inmost life; and in the struggle I might very well have fallen into the grave that seemed waiting for me. But now Providence has favored me; I find myself face to face with the only creature upon earth that can understand me. Let me only tell my

story, that she may know what my lot has been, and then I shall be able cheerfully to say farewell to the dream that is killing me. That, colonel, is the favor which I have to ask of you. Let me speak out, and don't be angry at what I shall say, and you will give me more than life."

There was something in Jan's manner at once so pleasing and telling of so much suffering that the colonel felt deeply affected. Moreover, he was not a little curious to hear an exposition which might perhaps confirm more than one conjecture which had arisen in him within the last few days. In a kind tone of voice, then, he replied,—

"Speak, my friend; I will listen attentively."

The young man began then, with a voice full of emotion:—

"I was young, contented with my lot, full of life and spirits. My heart impelled me to see a sister in a servant, and the more she had to suffer the more affection I felt for her. It was a pure, innocent feeling, which imperceptibly took root in my breast, though afterward it turned to a consuming fire. To this very hour, colonel, I feel my hand burn when I think of the Napoleons you put into it that day upon the heath. You thought to console me for the loss of my sister with coin! That was a death-blow to me; that showed me at once the immeasurable extent of my calamity: despair took a fast hold upon my heart, which your departure had already so cruelly torn; I forgot every thing but one thought, for

which alone I lived. Nothing could console me, nothing calm me; I was useless at my work, indifferent to every thing; I lived in a world of painful dreams. I saw my mother on a sick-bed, but my breast had no room for any new sorrow. They tried to tear me away from my accustomed scenes of life; they hoped that, removed from them, I should soon recover; but I resisted: remonstrances and supplications were alike lost on me. Why? Because the sky over the heath is bluer? Because its atmosphere is fraught with fragrance? Because the sense of endlessness transported me? Ah, no!—*she* had lived and wandered there, and I knew every spot of turf on which she had once sat, every tree which her hand had touched, every plant which her tears had bedewed; I suffered, because I regarded her as lost forever. At last I yielded to my mother's prayers and tears and our old pastor's advice, and set off for Mechlin, there to study and to seek in the duties of the ministry a protection against my recollections.

"Ah me! what suffering did I not go through in the seminary! The acquisition of knowledge, the reading of the ancient authors, developed my imagination more and more; and now I became utterly a slave to my dreams. I avoided all companions, and sought myself out quiet nooks, where I could give myself up to revery and hum over and over her favorite tune. I was the jest of all my fellow-students; but that made just as

little impression on me as the rebukes of my teacher. At last the time came when I had to declare whether I would take orders or not. But, God help me! how could I do that? I was unworthy to approach the altar; I declined, and left the seminary. My mother had meanwhile died. I had still remaining something of my inheritance. I dreamed away my life in total recklessness. Regardless of the future, I consumed what little I had left. That year I fell into the uttermost distress; but that affected me not at all; I slept under the blue sky, under wagons, upon the ramparts. Nothing could move me or wake me up from my apathy."

Here Jan paused a while; his breath came heavily with very exhaustion.

Monica leaned her hand upon the table and wept bitterly; the colonel sat with his eyes fixed on the ground.

At last Jan proceeded:—

"One day, as I was wandering half in despair along the Place de Meir, she that I had thought lost forever to me passed rapidly in a carriage. The shock deprived me for the moment of my senses. As soon as I recovered, I fled into the most unfrequented corner of the town. At night, weary with my wanderings, I lay down on a cart to rest, fell from it in my sleep, and so struck my head on the pavement in my fall that I lay there senseless and bleeding. A poor woman took me home to her garret and tended me. From that

time my whole heart was given to her. I had desired to die; now I had something to live for, —to return her love and repay her kindness. And now let me go; forget, colonel, what I have suffered for your daughter's sake. I acquit you of all obligation toward me; only forgive me the words which in my despair I have spoken to you; you shall never again hear or see aught of me. Farewell! and may God bless you!"

With these last words Jan had risen and was approaching the door, when suddenly Monica started from her chair, dashed her hand across her eyes and forehead, clearing the one of tears, the other of straggling curls, and cried, with a gesture almost as of command,—

"Stay! Oh, stay!"

Then, folding her hands as in prayer, and throwing herself at her father's feet, she went on:—

"Ah! forgive me! forgive me, father! keep him here, or I die! His image too was one of those which floated before me in my dreams; he is my brother; he was my faithful protector; I love him. He alone it is that can save me. Oh! keep him here!"

The colonel made haste to raise his daughter from the ground; then, with deep emotion, he spoke:—

"So, that was the mystery! What a heart! Be it so, Monica, my child. Belong to one another!"

A short sharp exclamation was all the reply

Jan could make. He supported himself on a chair that stood near; then, overpowered with joy and happiness, he sank upon it. Monica hastily threw her arms about him; the colonel's eyes filled with tears.

CHAPTER XI.

One day in 1831, shortly after the Belgian Revolution, a soldier was crossing the heath between Moll and Desschel, his musket on his shoulder, his knapsack on his back. He went up to a large farm-house—one might almost rather say a landed proprietor's mansion—and showed his billet to a man that was standing in the doorway, who thereupon called a servant-girl, and the two together immediately relieved their guest of his various burdens. Astonished at this unusually good reception, the soldier clapped his host on the shoulder.

"You've served, farmer?" said he.

"Not I," replied the farmer; "but within there you'll find one that can talk to you as much as you please of war and battles. Come in, friend, there's beer and ham just now on the table."

The soldier entered the sitting-room; there by the fireplace sat a man whose gray hair and venerable features inspired respect at the first look. A long scar on his face, the riband of the Legion of Honor at his buttonhole, sufficiently indicated that it was he of whom the farmer had spoken. He greeted the soldier with a smile of welcome,

and then pointed to the table, as though to say, "Eat and drink first, and then we'll talk."

The guest followed the hint with hearty goodwill, casting meanwhile stolen looks of curiosity on the different persons who made up the company. In the background sat the mistress of the house (so she appeared) at her spinning-wheel; by her stood the man who had received him at the door. Health and contentment beamed upon their countenances. On the other side of the mistress sat an old woman, plying with busy fingers the bobbins of a lace cushion.

The soldier's eyes were still occupied with this group, when his attention was attracted by a strange ditty from behind him. He turned about, and there on each knee of the old man with the scar sat a chubby, red-cheeked child, a boy and a girl; the old man was singing, and dancing the children on his knee to the tune.

It was not long before the young soldier had improved his acquaintance with the inhabitants of the farm; and so at home did he feel himself in this family—all the members of which seemed bound together by closest ties of love and gratitude, and treated him as one of themselves—that it cost him not a few tears when after a stay of two months he had to quit this peaceful and happy retreat.

His knapsack on his back, he stood at the door ready for his march; all the family pressed round him, with many a friendly shake of the hand. At

last he tore himself away, but at a little distance turned once again, and cried out, in a voice of deep emotion,—

"Farewell, Colonel Van Milgem! Farewell, Farmer Van Dael! Farewell, mistress! Farewell, Granny Teerlinck!"

As he crossed the heath, the soldier said to himself,—

"Now, if I had the knack of it, I'd set it down on paper all that they told me there. And as it is, perhaps, I'll try to. Ah, well! that's a dream."

And with these words he stepped out, in marching time, to a tune that he sang till it sounded over the heath as he went:—

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
The iron's warm;
Up with your arm.
Now strike, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

"Ricketicketack,
Ricketicketoo;
Strike while it's hot,
And tarry not.
Again, one, two,
Ricketicketoo."

You see, kind reader, that, after all, the young soldier has been as good as his word.

H. C.

THE END.

The Poor Gentleman.

THE

Poor Gentleman.

BY

HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

Translated expressly for the American Edition.

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Preface to the American Edition.

THE story of "THE POOR GENTLEMAN," now given in our language for the first time, is one of the series in which M. Conscience has delineated various grades of female character in positions of trial. In "The Village Innkeeper" he has shown the weaker traits of woman distracted between an inborn sense of propriety and a foolish ambition for high life. In the "Conscript" his heroine displays the nobler virtues of uncorrupted humble life; and, with few characters, taken from the lowest walks, he shows the triumph of honest, straightforward earnestness and pertinacious courage, even when they are brought in conflict with authority. "The Poor Gentleman" closes the series; and, selecting a heroine from the educated classes of his country-people, M. Conscience has demonstrated how superior a *genuine woman* becomes to all the mishaps of fortune, and how successfully she subdues that imaginary *fate* before which so many are seen to fall.

It would be difficult to describe this remarkable work without analyzing the tale and criticizing its personages. This would anticipate the author and mar the interest of his story. We must confine ourselves, therefore, to general remarks on its structure and characteristics.

Pontmartin, the distinguished French *feuilletonist*, says, in one of his "Literary Chats," that these simple stories are "pearls set in Flemish gold,—a gold which alchemysts seek for in alembics and furnaces, but which Conscience has found in the inexhaustible veins of nature." "The Poor Gentleman," he remarks, "is a tale of not more than a hun-

dred and fifty pages; but I would not give its shortest chapter for all the *romances* I ever read. The perplexed De Vlierbeck—who ought to have had Caleb Balderstone for a servant—is one of those characters that engrave themselves indelibly on our memory." In every trait and detail the author has attained a photographic minuteness, which, while it is distinct and sharp, never interferes with that motion, breadth, and picturesque effect that impart life and reality to a story. Nor can we doubt that it will be read and re-read as long as there is a particle of that feeling among us which installed the Vicar of Wakefield, Paul and Virginia, the Crock of Gold, the Sketch-book, and the Tales of a Traveller, among the heirlooms of every tasteful household. The "Tales of Flemish Life" are additions to that rare stock of home-literature which is at once amiable and gentle, simple and affectionate, familiar and tender, and which meets a quick response from every honest heart and earnest spirit.

If it be objected that the stories are too short and sketchy for the praise that has been bestowed on them, it may be answered that in their translation we have had the best opportunity to observe the skill, power, and perception of character which constitute their real merit. Simple as they seem, they are written with masterly art. In design, elaborateness, tone, and finish, they resemble the works of the Flemish School which have made us familiar with the Low Countries and their people through the pictures of Ruysdael, Teniers, and Ostade. There is scarcely a leaf that does not display some of those recondite or evanescent secrets of human nature which either escape ordinary writers, or, when found by them, are spread out over a volume instead of being condensed into a page.

Baltimore, August, 1856. THE TRANSLATOR.

THE

POOR GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

NEAR the end of July, 1842, an open *calèche* might have been seen rolling along one of the three highways that lead from the frontiers of Holland toward Antwerp. Although the vehicle had evidently been cleaned with the utmost care, every thing about it betokened decay. Its joints were open, discolored, and weather-beaten, and it swung from side to side on its springs like a rickety skeleton. Its patched leathers shone in the sunshine with the oil that had been used to freshen them, but the borrowed lustre could not hide the cracks and repairs with which they were defaced. The door-handles and other parts of the vehicle that were made of copper had been carefully polished, and the vestiges of silver-plating, still visible in the creases of the ornaments, denoted a former richness which had been almost entirely worn out by time and use.

The *calèche* was drawn by a stout, heavy horse, whose short and lumbering gait intimated very

clearly that he was oftener employed in the plough and cart than in carrying his owner toward the capital.

A peasant-boy of seventeen or eighteen was perched on the driver's seat. He was in livery; a tarnished gold band adorned his hat, and brass buttons glistened on his coat; but the hat fell over his ears, and the coat was so large that the driver seemed lost in it as in a bag. The garments had been worn by many of the lackey's predecessors on the box, and, in a long series of years, had doubtless passed from coachman to coachman till they descended to their present possessor.

The only person in the vehicle was a man about fifty years old. He was unquestionably the master of both servant and cabriolet, for his look and deportment commanded respect and consideration. With head depressed and moody air, he sat motionless and dreamy in his seat till he heard the approach of other vehicles, when, suddenly lifting his eyes, he would salute the strangers graciously and then instantly relapse into his former attitude. A moment's glance at this person was sufficient to excite an interest in him. His face, though hard and wrinkled, was so regular and noble in its contour, his look so mild and yet so earnest and penetrating, his broad brow so clear and lofty, that the most careless observer could not doubt that he was endowed with the best qualities of human nature. Besides this, there were unquestionable indications that he had been a sufferer.

If a simple glance at his features did not impress one with a conviction of this fact, it was confirmed by the fringe of silvery hair that straggled over his temples, and the sombre, melancholy fire that glimmered in his eyes like the last rays of expiring hope.

His dress was in perfect keeping with his physiognomy. It was of that neat and simple style which always characterizes a man of the world who is governed by refined and elegant tastes. His linen was spotlessly white, his cloth extremely fine, and his well-brushed hat shone smartly in the sunshine. Occasionally, as some one passed on the road, he might be seen to draw forth a handsome gold snuff-box and inhale a pinch with so graceful an air that an observer would be convinced he belonged to the highest classes of society. A malicious eye, it is true, might have discovered by close inspection that the brush had been too familiar with his coat and worn it threadbare, that his silk hat had been doctored to preserve its lustre and smoothness, and that his gloves were elaborately darned. If an inquisitive critic could have pried into the bottom of the vehicle, he would have detected a large crack in the side of the left boot, beneath which a gray stocking had been carefully masked with ink. Still, all these signs of poverty were so artfully concealed, and his dress worn with so careless an air of opulence and ease, that every body might have supposed the traveller did not put on better clothes only because he had a whim for bad ones.

The *calèche* had rolled along rapidly for about two hours, when the driver suddenly drew up at a small inn on the dike outside of the city of Antwerp. The landlady and groom instantly sallied forth, and by their profound salutations and civility exhibited their marked respect for a well-known stranger.

"It's a fine day, Monsieur Vlierbeck, isn't it?" said the dame; "yet it's a trifle warm, however. Don't you think it would be well for the high-grounds if we had a sprinkle more of rain, Monsieur Vlierbeck? Shall we give the horse some hay, Monsieur Vlierbeck? But stay: I see, now, your coachman has brought his hay with him. Will you take any thing, Monsieur Vlierbeck?"

While the hostess was pouring forth this torrent of questions, Monsieur De Vlierbeck got out of the vehicle, and, entering the house, addressed the most flattering compliments to the dame about her good looks, inquired as to the health of each of her children, and finished by apprizing her that he was obliged to be in town instantly. Thereupon, shaking her cordially by the hand, yet with a condescending air that marked and preserved the distance between them, he gave his orders to his lackey, and, with a farewell bow, walked toward the bridge leading into the city.

At a solitary spot on the outer rampart Monsieur De Vlierbeck stopped, looked round as if to see if any one was observing him, dusted his garments, brushed his hat with a handkerchief, and then

passed on through the Porte Rouge into the city of Antwerp.

As he entered a town where he was likely to find himself constantly an object of notice, he assumed a lofty carriage and self-satisfied air, which might have deceived any one into the belief that he was the happiest man on earth. And yet—alas, poor gentleman!—he was a prey to the profoundest agony! He was, perhaps, about to suffer *humiliation*,—a humiliation that would cut him to the very heart! But there was a being in the world whom he loved better than his life or honor,—his only child, his daughter! For her—how frequently had he already sacrificed his pride, how frequently had he suffered the pangs of martyrdom! Still, so great a slave was he to this passionate love that every new endurance, every new trial, raised him in his own estimation and exalted his pain into something that ennobled and sanctified his very nature!

His heart beat violently as he entered deeper and deeper into the heart of the city and approached the house he was about to visit. Soon after he stopped at a door, and, as he pulled the bell, his hand trembled violently in spite of extraordinary self-control; but as soon as a servant answered the summons he became master of himself again.

"Is the notary in?" inquired the old gentleman. The servant replied affirmatively, and, showing the

visitor into a small room, went to apprize his master.

As soon as Monsieur De Vlierbeck was alone, he put his right foot over the left to hide the rent in his boot, drew forth the gold snuff-box, and made ready to take a pinch.

The notary came in. He was a spare, business-looking man, and was preparing to salute his guest graciously, but no sooner did he perceive who it was than his face grew dark and assumed that reserved air with which a cautious man arms himself when he expects a request which he is predetermined to refuse. Instead, therefore, of lavishing on Monsieur De Vlierbeck the compliments with which he habitually welcomed his visitors, the notary confined himself to a few cold words of recognition and then sat down silently in front of him.

Wounded and humbled by this ungracious reception, poor De Vlierbeck was seized with a chill and became slightly pale; still, he managed to rally his nerves, as he remarked, affably,—

"Pray excuse me, sir; but, pressed by imperious necessity, I have come once more to appeal to your kindness for a small service."

"What is it you wish of me?" answered the notary, tartly.

"I wish you to find another loan of a thousand *francs* for me,—or even less,—secured by a mortgage on my property. I do not want all the money at once, but I have especial need of two hundred

francs, which I must ask the favor of you to lend me to-day. I trust you will not deny me this trifling loan, which will extricate me from the deepest embarrassment."

"A thousand *francs*, on mortgage?" growled the notary; "and who, pray, will guarantee the interest? Your property is already mortgaged for more than it is worth."

"Oh! you are mistaken, sir," exclaimed Monsieur De Vlierbeck, anxiously.

"Not the least in the world! By order of the persons who have already accommodated you with money, I caused your property to be appraised at the very highest rates; and the consequence is that your creditors will not get back their loans unless it shall sell for an extraordinary price. Permit me to say, sir, that you have acted very foolishly: had I been in your place, I would not have sacrificed all my fortune, and my wife's too, to save a worthless fellow, even though he had been my brother!"

De Vlierbeck frowned, as a painful recollection shot through his mind, but said nothing, though his hand grasped the golden snuff-box as if he would have crushed it.

"By that imprudent act," continued the notary, "you have plunged yourself and your child into absolute want; for you can no longer disguise it. For ten years—and God knows at what cost—you have been able to keep the secret of your ruin; but the inevitable hour is approaching, Monsieur

De Vlierbeck, when you will be forced to surrender every thing!"

De Vlierbeck riveted a look of doubt and agony on the notary as the latter continued:—

"I must tell you frankly the condition of your affairs. Monsieur de Hoogebaen died during his journey in Germany; his heirs found your bond for four thousand *francs*, and have directed me *not* to renew it. If Monsieur Hoogebaen was your friend his heirs certainly are not. During ten years you have failed to cancel this debt, and have paid two thousand *francs* interest; so that, for your own sake, it is time the transaction should be closed. Four months are still left, Monsieur Vlierbeck, before the expiration of——"

"*Only* four months!" interrupted the poor gentleman, in a distressed tone; "*only* four months, and then——oh, God!"

"Then your property will be sold according to law," said the notary, dryly, finishing the sentence. "I can well understand, sir, that this is a painful prospect; but, as it is a decree of fate that no one can control, you have nothing to do but prepare to receive the blow. Let me offer to sell your estate as if you 'were leaving the country.' By that means you will escape the mortification of a forced sale."

For several moments Monsieur De Vlierbeck remained silent, his face buried in his hands, as if crushed by the notary's advice and callousness. At length he replied, calmly but humbly,—

"Your counsel is, perhaps, wise and generous; yet I will not follow it. You know that all my sacrifices, my painful life, my constant agony, have been patiently endured for the sake of my only child. You alone know that all I do has but one purpose,—a purpose which I hold sacred. I have reason to believe that God is about granting the earnest prayer I have daily offered for ten years. My daughter is beloved by a rich gentleman, whose character I think I may confide in, and his family appears to sympathize in all his views. *Four months!* it is but a short time, alas! yet, ought I, by anticipating the legal period of a sale, to destroy all my fond hopes? Ought I instantly to welcome misery for myself and my child when I see the chance of sure relief from all we have suffered?"

"Then you want to *deceive* these people, whoever they may be? Do you not suppose that by such a course of conduct you may make your daughter still more wretched?"

At the word "*deceive*" the poor gentleman winced as if stung by an adder, while a nervous thrill ran through his limbs and suffused his face with a blush of shame.

"*Deceive!*" echoed he, bitterly; "oh, no! but I dare not, by a rash avowal of my want, stifle the love that is growing up mutually. Whenever it becomes necessary to be decided, I will make a loyal disclosure of my condition. If the declaration ruin my hopes I will follow your advice. I

will sell all I have; I will quit the country and seek in some foreign land to maintain myself and my beloved child by teaching." He stopped for a moment, as if swallowing his grief, and then continued, in a lower tone, half speaking to himself, "And, yet, did I not promise my dear wife on her death-bed—did I not promise it on the holy cross—that our child should not undergo such a fate? Ten years of suffering—ten abject years—have not sufficed to realize my promise; and now, at last, a feeble ray of hope struggles into my sombre future——" He grasped the notary's hand, looked wildly but earnestly into his eyes, and added, in suppliant tones, "Oh, my friend, help me! help me in this last and trying effort; do not prolong my torture; grant my prayer, and as long as I live I will bless my benefactor, the savior of my child!"

The notary withdrew his hand as he answered, with some embarrassment, "Yet, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, I cannot comprehend what all this has to do with the loan of a thousand *francs!*"

De Vlierbeck thrust his rejected hand into his pocket as he replied, "Yes, sir, it *is* ridiculous, is it not, to fall so low and to see one's happiness or misery depend on things about which other persons may laugh? And yet, alas! so it is! The young gentleman of whom I spoke to you is to dine with us to-morrow in company with his uncle,—the uncle invited himself,—and we have absolutely *nothing to give them!* Besides this, my child

needs some trifles to appear decently before the guests, and it is probable that the civility will be returned by an invitation from them. Our isolation cannot long conceal our want. Sacrifices of all kinds have already been made to prevent our being overwhelmed with mortification." As he uttered these last words he drew forth his hand from his pocket with about two *francs* in small change, which he held exposed on his palm before the notary. "And now, behold," continued he, with a bitter smile,—"behold every cent I have in the world; and to-morrow rich people are to dine at my house! If my poverty is betrayed by any thing, farewell to my child's prospects! For God's sake, my good friend, be generous, and help me!"

"A thousand *francs!*" muttered the notary, shaking his head; "I can't deceive my clients, sir. What pledge can you give to secure the loan? You possess nothing which is not already mortgaged beyond its value."

"A thousand! five hundred! two hundred!" cried De Vlierbeck. "Lend me, at least, *something* to relieve me from this cruel difficulty!"

"I have no disposable funds," replied the notary, coldly. "In a fortnight perhaps I may have some; but even then I could promise nothing positively."

"Then, for the sake of friendship, I beseech you, lend me some money yourself!"

"I could never expect that you would return

what I might lend," said the notary, contemptuously; "and so it is an *alms* you ask of me?"

Poor De Vlierbeck trembled on his chair and became pale as ashes; his eyes flashed wildly and his brow knotted with frowns. Yet he quickly curbed the unwonted agitation, bowed his head, and sighed, resignedly, "ALMS! Alas! so be it! let me drink the very dregs of this bitter cup: *it is for my child!*"

The notary went to a drawer and took from it some five-franc-pieces, which he offered to his visitor. It is difficult to say whether the poor gentleman was wounded by the actual receipt of charity, or whether the sum was too small to be useful; but, without touching the money, he glanced angrily at the silver and fell back in his chair, covering his face with his hands.

Just at this moment a servant entered, announcing another visitor; and, as soon as the lackey left the apartment, Monsieur De Vlierbeck sprang from his chair, dashing away the tears that had gathered in his eyes. The notary pointed to the money, which he laid on the corner of the table; but the mortified guest turned away his head with a gesture of repugnant refusal.

"Pardon my boldness, sir," said he, "but I have now only one favor to ask of you

"And it is——?"

"That you will keep my secret for my daughter's sake."

'Oh, as to that, make yourself easy. You know

me well enough to be aware of my discretion. Do you decline this trifling aid?"

"Thanks! thanks!" cried the gentleman, pushing away the notary's hand; and, trembling as if seized by a sudden chill, he rushed from the room and the house without waiting for the servant to open the door.

Utterly overcome by the terrible blow to his hopes, beside himself with mortification, with his head hanging on his bosom and his eyes bent staringly on the ground, the poor fellow ran about the streets for a considerable length of time without knowing what he was about or whither he was going. At length the stern conviction of want and duty partially aroused him from his feverish dream, and he walked on rapidly in the direction of the gate of Borgenhout, till he found himself entirely alone among the fortifications.

He had no sooner reached this solitary quarter than a terrible conflict seemed to begin within him; his lips quivered and muttered incoherently, while his face exhibited a thousand different expressions of suffering, shame, and hope. After a while he drew forth from his pocket the golden snuff-box, looked long and sadly on the armorial engravings that adorned it, and then fell into a reverie, from which he suddenly aroused himself as if about taking a solemn resolution. With his eyes intently fixed on the box, he began to obliterate the arms with his knife, as he murmured, in a voice of tremulous emotion,—

"Remembrancer of my dear and excellent mother, protecting talisman that has so long concealed my misery and which I invoked as a sacred shield whenever poverty was on the eve of betraying me, last fragment of my ancestry, I must bid thee farewell; and—alas! alas!—my own hand must profane and destroy thee! God grant that the last service thou wilt ever render me may save us from overwhelming humiliation!"

A tear trickled down his wan cheek as his voice became still; but he went on with his task of obliteration till every trace of the crest and shield disappeared from the emblazoned lid. After this he returned to the heart of the town and passed through a number of small and lonely streets, glancing eagerly, but askance, at the signs as he passed onward in his agitation.

An hour had certainly elapsed in this bootless wandering, when he entered a narrow lane in the quarter of Saint André and uttered a sudden cry of joy as he caught a glimpse of the object for which he was in search. His eye lighted on a sign which bore the simple but ominous inscription:—"Sworn Pawnbroker." He passed by the door and walked rapidly to the end of the lane; then, turning hastily, he retraced his steps, hastening or lingering as he noticed any one passing in his neighborhood, till at length he crept along the wall to the door, and, seeing the thoroughfare almost empty, rushed into the house and disappeared.

After a considerable time De Vlierbeck came forth from the money-lender's and quickly gained another street. There was a slight expression of satisfaction in his eyes; but the bright blush that suffused his haggard cheeks gave token of the new humiliation through which the sufferer had passed. Walking rapidly from street to street, he soon reached a pastry-cook's, where he filled a basket with a stuffed turkey, a pie, preserves, and various other smaller equipments for the table, and, paying for his purchases, told the cook that he would send his servant for the packages. Farther on he bought a couple of silver spoons and a pair of ear-rings from a jeweller, and then proceeded on his way, probably to make additional acquisitions for the proposed entertainment.

CHAPTER II.

In our wild and thorny region of the North a brave and toilsome peasantry have long been engaged in victorious conflict with the barren sleep to which nature seemed to have condemned the soil. They have stirred up the sterile depths and watered them with their sweat; they have summoned science and industry to their aid, drained marshes, diverted the streamlets that descended

toward the Meuse from the highlands and put them in circulation through innumerable arteries to fatten and enrich the land. What a glorious fight it was of man against matter! What a magnificent triumph it has been to convert the unthrifty Campine* into a fruitful and luxurious region! Indeed, our descendants will hardly believe their own eyes when in future times they shall behold grass-covered plains, flowery meadows, and fields waving with grain, where the lingering patriarchs of our day may point out the sites of burning sand-pits and barren moors!

North of the city of Antwerp, toward the frontiers of Holland, there are but few traces of this gradual improvement. It is only along highroads that the traveller begins to observe the effect of liberal agriculture on the sandy soil, while, farther on toward the heart of the region, every thing is still bare and uncultivated. As far as the eye can penetrate, nothing is to be seen in that quarter but arid plains thinly covered with stunted vegetation, while the horizon is bounded by that blue and cloudy line which always marks the limit of a desert. Yet, as we journey over these vast spaces, it is impossible not to observe, from time to time, that a clear and slender rivulet meanders here and

* The Flemings have given the name of *Campine* to the vast uncultivated spaces extending in the north of Belgium from the vicinity of Antwerp to Venloo. The improvement of the *Campine*, undertaken on a large scale within some years, has already produced the happiest results.

there over the moor, and that its verdant banks are studded with vigorous plants and thrifty trees; while in many places the hardy sons of toil who took advantage of the neighboring water, have opened their lonely farms, built comfortable houses, and frequently gathered themselves together in neat and thrifty villages.

In one of these spots, where meadow-land and pasturage have made agriculture profitable, and by the side of an unfrequented road, there is a farm of considerable size and value. The massive trees which spread their thick shade on every side attest that the spot has been occupied and cultivated for several generations. Besides, the ditches which surround it, and the stone bridge that leads to the principal gate, justify the belief that the estate has some right to be considered a lordly demesne. In the neighborhood it is known as GRINSELHOF. The entire front of the property is covered by the homestead of the farmer, comprising his stables and granges; so that, in fact, every thing in their rear is concealed by these edifices as well as by dense thickets and hedges which are growing in all the wild luxuriance of nature. Indeed, the dwelling of the proprietor was a mystery even to the farmer who worked the soil; for its surrounding copses were an impenetrable veil to his eyes, beyond which neither he nor his family were ever allowed to pass without special permission.

Within this lonely and sacred precinct, buried

in foliage, was a large house, called THE CHÂTEAU, inhabited by a gentleman and his daughter, who, without a single servant, companion, or attendant, led the lonely lives of hermits. The neighbors said that it was avarice or ill-humor that induced a person possessed of so beautiful an estate to bury himself in such a solitude. The farmer who worked on the property carefully avoided all explanations as to the conduct or purpose of the proprietor, and sedulously respected the mysterious habits and fancies of his master. His business prospered; for the soil was fertile and the rent low. Indeed, he was grateful to his landlord, and, every Sunday, lent him a horse, which carried him and his daughter, in their weather-beaten *calèche*, to the village church. On great occasions the farmer's son performed the duty of lackey for the proprietor.

It is an afternoon of one of the last days of July. The sun has nearly finished his daily course, and is declining rapidly toward the horizon; still, his rays, though less ardent than at noontide, are hot enough to make the air close and stifling. At Grinselhof the last beams of the setting luminary play gayly over the foliage, gilding the tree-tops with sparkling light, while, on the eastern side of the dense foliage, the long, broad shadows begin to fall athwart the sward, and prepare the groves for the gentle and refreshing breeze that springs up at twilight.

Sadness and gloom hang over the sombre château and its grounds; a deathlike silence weighs like a gravestone on the desolate scene; the birds are songless; the wind is still; not a leaf stirs; and light alone seems to be living in that dreary solitude. No one could observe the entire absence of noise, motion, and vitality, without being impressed with the idea that nature had been suddenly plunged in a deep and magic sleep.

Suddenly the foliage at the end of a thicket in the distance is seen to stir, while a cloud of twittering birds, frightened from the herbage, flies rapidly across the little path, which is immediately occupied by a young female dressed entirely in white, who dashes from between the branches with a silken net in pursuit of a butterfly. The beautiful apparition, with loose and streaming hair, seemed rather to fly than run, as her light and rapid steps, full of eagerness and animation, scarcely touched the earth while darting after the gaudy insect. How graceful she is, as, halting for an instant beneath the coquettish moth, she looks up to behold its gold-and-purple wings dancing round her head, mocking and playing with its gay pursuer! She thinks she has caught it; but, alas! the edge of her net only touched the butterfly's wings, and away it dashes, over hedge and copse, far, far beyond her reach! How beautiful she is, as, in that golden light, warmed with exercise and excitement, her eyes glistening, her lips parted, her graceful arms stretched upward, she

stands gazing, half pleased, half disappointed, after the departing insect, till it is lost in the evening sky! Wind and sunshine have slightly tanned her delicate cheeks, but their roses are only heightened into the glow of perfect health. Beneath her high and polished brow, coal-black eyes shine through long and silken fringes, while a chiselled mouth discloses rows of faultless pearls between lips which shame the coral! Her stately head is framed in masses of long, curling hair; and, as the locks are floated over her ivory shoulders by rapid motion, the proud and arching lines of her swan-like neck are fully displayed in all their splendor. Her form is lithe and supple, and its graceful contour is modestly marked by a snowy dress. As she lifts her head and gazes at the sky, a poet might easily fancy her to be some fanciful "being of the air," and convert her into the fairy queen of the solitary realm!

For a long while this beautiful woman wandered about the paths of the lonely garden, seemingly absorbed in reveries of various kinds. At times she was gay, at times sad. At length she approached a bed of violets, which, from the training of the plants, had evidently been carefully tended, and, observing that they languished under the intense heat of the past day, began to grieve over them.

"Alas! my dear little flowers, why did I neglect to water you yesterday? You are very thirsty, are you not, my charming pets?"

For a moment or two she was quiet, still gazing at the violets, and then continued, in the same dreamy tone:—

"But then, alas! since yesterday my mind has been so disturbed, so happy, so——" Her eyes fell, and a blush crimsoned her cheeks, as she murmured, softly, "GUSTAVE!"

Motionless as a statue, and absorbed in her enchanting dream, she forgot the poor little violets, and, probably, the whole world.

"His image ever, ever before me! his voice ever ringing in my ears! Why try to escape their fascination? Oh, God! what is this that is passing within me? My heart trembles; sometimes my blood bounds wildly through my veins, and then again it creeps and freezes; and yet how happy I am! what inexpressible joy fills my very soul!"

She was silent; then, seeming suddenly to rouse herself, she raised her head and threw back the thick curls, as if anxious to disembarrass her mind of a haunting thought.

"Wait, my dear flowers," said she, smiling, to the violets; "wait a moment: I will comfort and refresh you."

With this she disappeared in the grove, and, in a short time, brought from it a few twigs and leaves, which she arranged in a little trellis over the flower-beds, so as to shadow the violets completely from the sun. After this she took a small watering-pot and ran across the grass to a basin

or tank in the middle of the garden, around which a number of weeping-willows drooped their branches into the water. On her arrival its surface was perfectly smooth; but hardly had her image been reflected in the tank when it appeared to swarm with living creatures. Hundreds of gold-fishes, of all colors, swam toward her with their mouths gaping from the water, as if the poor little animals were trying to speak to her. Holding on by the trunk of the nearest willow, she bent gracefully over the pond and tried to fill her watering-pot without touching the gold-fish.

"Come, come; let me alone just now," said she, as she carefully avoided them; "I haven't time to play with you; I will bring you your dinner after a while."

But the fish fluttered around the watering-pot until she withdrew it from the tank; and, even after her departure, continued to crowd toward the bank she had touched with her foot.

The young lady watered her flowers and replaced the pot gently on the ground; then, retiring slowly to the solitary house, she returned after a while at the same slow pace, and, throwing some crumbs to the fish, began to saunter slowly about the garden-paths, inattentive to every thing but her own absorbing thoughts. At length she reached a spot where a gigantic catalpa-tree overarched the garden and bent its branches almost to the earth. A table and a couple of chairs stood beneath the fresh and fragrant shade, and a book,

inkstand, and embroidery-frame, gave token that the retreat had not long been abandoned by the lady herself. She seated herself in one of the chairs, took up the book, then the embroidery, let them fall one after another, and finally leaned her beautiful head on her hand, like one who is weary in spirit and anxious for rest.

For a while her large dreamy eyes were vaguely fixed, as if gazing into space; at intervals a smile played around her mouth, and her lips moved as if talking with a friend. Occasionally her drooping eyelids closed entirely; but the lashes quickly reopened, only to fall more heavily than before, till at last a profound sleep or intense reverie seemed to get possession of her mind and body.

But did she sleep? There is no doubt that her spirit watched and was happy; for a pleasant expression constantly played over her features, and, if sometimes it became serious, the joyous look quickly returned with all its radiance. She had long been plunged by this happy dream into complete forgetfulness of real life, when a noise of wheels and the neigh of a horse was heard at the gateway, disturbing the silence of Grinselhof. Still the maiden was not aroused.

The old *calèche* returned from the city, drew up near the stable, and the farmer and his wife ran out to salute their master and put up the horse. While they were thus engaged, Monsieur De Vlierbeck got out of the vehicle and spoke to them

kindly, but in a voice so full of sadness that both looked at him with astonishment. In fact, the gravity of this singular person never abandoned him even in his most affable moods; but at that moment his physiognomy indicated a degree of intense depression which was by no means habitual. He seemed altogether worn out with fatigue, and his eyes, which were commonly so vivacious, drooped, dull and languishing, beneath their heavy lids.

The horse was quickly put in the stable, and the young lackey, who had already divested himself of his livery, took several baskets and packets from the vehicle, carried them into the farmhouse, and placed them on the table of the antechamber.

"And now, Master John," said De Vlierbeck, approaching the farmer, "I shall have need of you. There will be company to-morrow at Grinselhof. Monsieur Denecker and his nephew dine here."

The farmer, perfectly stupefied by the announcement and scarcely able to believe his own ears, looked at his master with staring eyes and gaping mouth, and, after a moment's hesitation, stammered forth,—

"That large, rich gentleman, sir, who sits near you every Sunday at high mass?"

"The same, John. Is there any thing surprising in it?"

"And young Monsieur Gustave, who spoke to

mademoiselle in the churchyard when church was over?"

"The same!"

"Oh, sir, they are such rich people! They have bought all the land around Echelpoel. They have at least ten horses in the stable at their *château*, without counting those they have in town. Their carriage is silver from top to bottom."

"I know it; and it is exactly on that account that I desire to receive them in a becoming manner. You must be ready; your wife and your son also. I shall call you to-morrow morning very early. You will willingly lend a hand to help me, won't you?"

"Certainly, certainly, sir; a word from you is enough. I am always happy to be able to serve you in any way."

"Thank you for your kindness, John. We understand one another, my worthy fellow; and so farewell till to-morrow."

Monsieur De Vlierbeck entered the farm-house, gave some orders to the young man in relation to the things he had taken from the vehicle, and, passing through the screening grove, walked on to Grinselhof.

As soon as he was out of the farmer's sight his physiognomy assumed a more serene expression, and there was a smile on his lips as he cast his eyes around in search of some one in the solitude of the garden. At a turn of the path his eye fell

suddenly on the sleeping girl. How beautiful she was in her calm repose! The golden twilight covered her with its bright reflection and threw a rosy tint on every thing about her. Thick curls strayed in beautiful disorder over her cheeks, and snowy flowers, shaken from the catalpa's branches by the evening breeze, had fallen around her in profusion. She still dreamed, and the happy smile yet rested on her features. De Vlierbeck gazed earnestly at his sleeping child, and raised his eyes to heaven as he said, tremulously,—

"Thanks, Almighty Father! she is happy! Let my martyrdom be prolonged; but may all my sufferings render thee compassionate for her!"

After this short and ardent ejaculation he threw himself into a chair, leaned his arm carefully on the table, and, resting his hand on it, remained still as a statue. For a long time he watched his sleeping child, while his face seemed to reflect each emotion that flitted across the delicate features of the maiden. Suddenly a modest blush overspread her brow, and her lips began to articulate. The old gentleman watched her narrowly, and, although she had not spoken in connected sentences, he caught one of those stray words which often betoken what is passing in a dreamer's mind.

"'Gustave!' She dreams of Gustave. May God be propitious to us! Ah, yes, my child," exclaimed her father, "open thy heart to hope! Dream, dream; for who knows what is in store for us?

Yet, no !—let us not destroy these happy moments by cold reality ! Sleep, sleep ! let thy soul enjoy the heavenly enchantment of love which it is awakening !"

Monsieur De Vlierbeck continued for a while his quiet observation of the sleeper, and then, rising, passed behind her chair and imprinted a long kiss on her forehead.

Still half-dreaming, the sleeper slowly opened her eyes ; and, the moment she perceived who had awakened her, she sprang into her father's arms with a bound, and, hanging round his neck, overwhelmed him with questions and kisses.

Vlierbeck gently disengaged himself from his daughter's embrace, as he remarked, in a tone of raillery, —

"It seems altogether unnecessary, Lenora, to inquire what new beauties you have discovered in Vondel's 'Lucifer.' You have not had time, I take it for granted, to begin the comparison between this masterpiece of our native tongue and Milton's 'Paradise Lost' ?"

"Ah! father," murmured Lenora, "my mind is indeed strangely troubled. I do not know what is the matter with me ; I cannot even read with attention.'

"Come, Lenora, my child, don't be sad. Sit down : I have something of importance to tell you. You do not know why I went to town to-day, do you? It was because we are to have company to dinner to-morrow !"

Lenora gazed at her father with an earnest and questioning look.

"It is Monsieur Denecker," continued he:—"the wealthy merchant, you know, who sits near me at church and lives at the *château* of Echelpoel."

"Oh, yes! I remember him, father; he always speaks to me so kindly, and never fails to help me from the carriage when we go to church."

"But your *eyes* ask, I see, Lenora, whether he is coming *alone*. *Another* person will accompany him, my girl!"

"*Gustave!*" exclaimed the maiden, involuntarily and blushing.

"Exactly! Gustave will be here," replied Monsieur De Vlierbeck. "Don't tremble on that account, Lenora; and don't become frightened because your innocent heart may find itself opening to the dawn of new sensations. Between us, my child, there can be no secret that my love will not discover."

His daughter's eyes looked inquiringly into his own, as if asking an explanation of the enigma. But all of a sudden, as if a ray had darted unexpectedly into her soul, she threw her arms around the old man's neck and hid her face in his bosom.

"Oh, father! beloved father," murmured she, "your kindness is unbounded!"

For some moments the old gentleman did not put aside the affectionate caresses of his child; but by degrees his expression became gloomy; tears started into his eyes, and he said, in broken tones,—

"Lenora, whatever may happen to us in life, thou wilt always love thy father thus, wilt thou not?"

"Always, always, father!'

"Lenora, my child," continued he, with a sigh, "thy tender affection is my only recompense and happiness here below: never deprive my soul of its consolation!"

The sad tone in which these words were uttered touched the maiden's heart so deeply that she took her father's hands, without saying a syllable, and wept in silence with her head in his bosom.

For a long time they remained thus motionless, absorbed by a feeling which was neither joy nor sorrow but seemed to acquire its power and mastery by the mingling of these opposite sentiments.

Monsieur De Vlierbeck's expression was the first to change. His features became severe as he bent his head downward reproachfully. In truth, the strange words that started the tears into his daughter's eyes had excited the reflection in his own mind that another person was, perhaps, about to share his Lenora's love and probably to separate him from her forever. He was ready for every sacrifice, were it even infinitely greater, provided it contributed to the happiness of his child; yet the very idea of separation caused his heart to bleed at every pore. By degrees he stifled this selfish anxiety, and, striving to control himself, raised his daughter with a kiss.

"Come, Lenora," said he, "be gay again! Isn't

it a happy thing that our hearts can sometimes get into the shade after they have been too much in the sunshine? Let us go into the house. We have many arrangements to make in order to receive our guests becomingly."

Lenora obeyed her father in silence, and followed him slowly, while the tears still dropped from her beautiful eyes.

Some hours afterward Monsieur De Vlierbeck might have been seen seated in the principal saloon of Grinselhof, near a little lamp, with his elbows on the table. The apartment was dark and dreary, for the feeble rushlight illuminated but a single spot and cast the distant and lofty ceiling into vague obscurity. The flickering flame threw long and sombre shadows over the wall, while a line of old portraits in the panels seemed to fix their stern and immovable eyes on the table. Amid the gloom nothing came out with distinctness but the calm and noble face of the poor old gentleman, who sat there, absorbed in his reflections, fixed as a statue.

At length, rising from his chair and cautiously walking on tiptoe to the end of the room, he stopped and listened at the closed door. "She sleeps," said he, in a low voice; and, raising his eyes to heaven, added, with a sigh, "may God protect her rest!" Then, returning to the table, he took the lamp, and, opening a large safe which was imbedded in the wall, he went down on his knees and drew forth some napkins and a table-

cloth, which he unfolded carefully to see whether they were torn or stained. As he refolded the articles one after the other, a smile betokened that he was pleased with his examination. Rising from this task, he went back to the table, from the drawer of which he took a piece of buckskin and whiting. Mashing the latter with a knife-handle, he began to rub and polish several silver forks and spoons which were in a basket. The salt-cellars and other small articles of table-service, which were mostly of the same metal, were all subjected to a similar process, and soon glittered brightly in the feeble lamplight.

While he was engaged in this strange work, the soul of the poor old man was busy with a thousand conflicting thoughts and recollections. He was constantly muttering to himself; and many a tear escaped from his lids as he dreamed over the past and repeated the names of the loved and lost!

"Poor brother!" ejaculated he; "but one man alone in the world knows what I have done for thee, and yet that man accuses me of bad faith and ingratitude! And thou, poor brother, art wandering in the icy solitudes of America, a prey perhaps to sickness and suffering, while for months no kindly look is fixed upon thee in that wilderness where thou earnest thy miserable wages! Son of a noble race! thou hast become a slave to the stranger, and thy toil serves to amass the fortunes which others are to enjoy! My love for thee has made me suffer martyrdom; but, as God is my

judge, my affection has remained entire,—untouched! May thy soul, O brother, feel this aspiration of mine even in the isolation where thou art suffering; and may the consciousness of my love be a balm for thy misery!"

The poor gentleman was absorbed for some time in painful meditation; but after a while his dream seemed over, and he betook himself again to work. He placed all the silver utensils side by side on the table, and, after carefully counting and examining them, resumed his soliloquy:—

"Six forks! eight spoons! We shall be four at table: it will be necessary to be careful; else it will easily be seen something is wanting. I think, however, it will do. I must give very precise instructions to John's wife, for she is a clever woman, and knows what she is about!"

As he uttered the last words he replaced the silver in the basket and locked it in the safe; after which he took the lamp, and, leaving the saloon on tiptoe, descended through a little door into a large vaulted cellar. Here he hunted about for a considerable time amid stacks of empty bottles, and at last succeeded in finding what he was in search of; but his face became extremely pale as he drew three bottles from the sand.

"Good heavens! *only three bottles!*" exclaimed he; "three bottles of *table*-wine! and Monsieur Denecker is such a connoisseur of vintages! What shall I do if they ask for more when these three bottles are empty? I have it! I do not drink,

and Lenora drinks very little; so there will be *two* bottles for Monsieur Denecker and *one* for his nephew! But, even at the worst, what is the use of anxiety? Let *luck* settle it!"

With this De Vlierbeck went into the corners of the cellar, where he gathered from the walls a quantity of cobwebs, which he wound artistically around the bottles and covered with dust and sand.

On reaching the saloon he went to work with paste and paper to mend some rents in the tapestry on the wall; and then, after passing nearly half an hour in brushing his clothes and disguising their threadbare spots with water and ink, he came back to the table and made preparations for a task which was still more singular than any he had hitherto been engaged in. Taking from the drawer a silk thread, an awl, and a bit of wax, he put his boot on his knees and began to mend the rents in the leather with the skill of a cobbler! It will readily be supposed that this odd occupation stirred a variety of emotions in the heart of the poor gentleman; violent twitches and spasms passed over his face; his cheeks became red, then deadly pale; till at last, yielding to a passionate impulse, he cut the silk, threw it on the table, and, with his hands stretched toward the portraits, cried out, with struggling passion,—

"Yes! behold me,—behold me,—ye whose noble blood runs in my veins! You, brave captain, who, fighting at the side of Egmont, at St. Quentin, gave your life for your country,—you,

statesman and ambassador, who, after the battle of Pavia, rendered such eminent services to the Emperor Charles,— you, benefactor of your race, who endowed so many hospitals and churches, —you, proud bishop, who, as priest and scholar, defended so bravely your faith and your God,— behold me, all of you, not only from that senseless canvas, but from the bosom of God where you are at rest! He whom you have seen at the wretched task of mending his boots, and who devotes his life to the concealment of his poverty,—he is your descendant, your son! If the gaze of his fellow-men tortures him, before you at least he is not ashamed of debasing toil! O glorious ancestry! you have fought the foes of your native land with sword and pen; but I,— I have to contend with unmerited shame and mockery, without a hope of ultimate triumph or glory; my weary soul sinks under its burden, and the world has nothing in store for me but scorn and contempt! And, yet, have I ever stained your noble escutcheon? All that I have done is generous and honest in the sight of God;—nay, the very fountain-head of my wo is love and compassion! . Yes, yes!—fix your glittering eyes on me; contemplate me in the abyss of poverty where I am fallen! From the bottom of that pit I lift my brow boldly toward you, and your silent glance does not force me to grovel in the earth with shame! Here, in the presence of your noble images, I am alone with

my soul, with my conscience;—here, no mortification can touch the being who, as gentleman, Christian, brother, and father, has sacrificed himself to duty!"

His voice ceased; and for a few moments he stood still in the midnight silence, looking at the antique portraits as the last echoes died away in the lofty apartment, with his arms stretched toward the pictures as if invoking the beings they represented.

"Poor, senseless creature," continued he, after a while, clasping his hands and lifting them anew to heaven, "thy soul seeks deliverance in dreams! Yes; it is, perhaps, a dream, an illusion! Yet, thanks, thanks to the Almighty that allows even a dream to fortify me with courage and endurance! Enough: reality once more stares me in the face; and yet I defy the mocking spectre which points to ruin and misery!"

"And then to-morrow,—to-morrow!" continued he; "wilt thou not tremble beneath the glance of those who seek the secret of thy life? Yes; study well thy part; have ready thy mask; go on bravely with thy cowardly farce! And now begone; thy nightly task is done;—beg, beg from sleep the oblivion of what thou art and of thy threatening future! *Sleep!* I tremble at the very thought of it! Father in heaven, have mercy on us!"

CHAPTER III.

At daybreak next morning everybody was busy at Grinselhof. John's wife and her serving-maid scoured the corridor and staircase; the farmer cleaned his stable; his son weeded the grass from the garden-walks. Very early in the day Lenora set matters in order in the dining-room and arranged with artistic taste all the pretty things she could find on the mantel-piece and tables. There was a degree of life and activity about Grinselhof that had not been seen in that solitude for many a year, and everybody went to work with alacrity, as if anxious to dispel the gloom that hung so long over the lonely dwelling. In the midst of the industrious crowd Monsieur De Vlierbeck might be seen moving about with words of encouragement and expressions of satisfaction; nor did he manifest the slightest symptom of the anxiety that was secretly gnawing his heart. A pleasant smile flattered his humble dependants, as he gave them to understand that their labors would be greatly honored by the approval of his expected guests.

The farmer and his spouse had never seen De Vlierbeck so pleasant and so gay; and, as they

sincerely loved their master, they were as much delighted by his joy as if they had been preparing for a village fair in which they were to take part. They never dreamed of pay for their generous toil, but derived their most grateful recompense from the pleasure they imparted to the hermit and his child.

As soon as the principal preparations were completed, De Vlierbeck called his daughter and gave the necessary instructions for the dinner. Lenora was to confine herself to drilling the farmer's wife in serving the dishes with which she was not familiar. The old cooking-apparatus was lighted; wood kindled and crackled in the chimney; coals glistened in the grate; and, high above the roof-tree, clouds of smoke betokened the good cheer that was to adorn the tables. Baskets of game were opened; stuffed poultry, savory pasties, and choice viands, were brought forth; dishes of green peas, beans, and other vegetables, appeared; and the women were speedily in a turmoil of stringing, shelling, cutting, washing, and stewing.

Lenora herself did not shun her part in these humble duties, and amused her companions by the pleasant chat with which she whiled away the hours. The rustics, who had rarely enjoyed an opportunity of seeing her so closely or of enjoying a familiar conversation with the beauty, were of course delighted with her gay and affable manners; nor could they avoid expressing their

pleasure when a few notes of a popular song happened to drop from Lenora's lips.

The servant-maid instantly rose, and whispered, loud enough to be heard by Lenora,—

"Oh, pray, do beg *mademoiselle* to sing a verse or two of that song! I heard it at a distance the other day; and it was so beautiful that, fool as I am, I blubbered like a baby for half an hour behind the rose-bushes. And yet I think it was rather her sweet voice than the words that made me cry."

"Oh, yes! do sing it for us; it would give us so much pleasure! Your voice is like a nightingale's; and I remember too, that my poor mother —alas! she is long ago in heaven—used to sing me to sleep with that blessed song. Pray, sing it for us, *mademoiselle.*

"It's very long," said Lenora, smiling.

"But if you only sing a verse or two; it is a holiday with us, you know, *mademoiselle!*"

"Well," returned Lenora, musingly, "if it will make you happy why should I refuse? Listen:—

"Beside a deep and rapid stream
A lonely maiden sat;
With sighs her snowy bosom heaved,
And tears bedewed the ground!

"A noble walked along the bank
And saw her bitter grief;
And, as her tears overflowed his heart,
It melted for the maid!

Speak, maiden, speak!' the wanderer cried!
'Why moan you here alone?'——
'Ah, sir, an orphan-child am I,
Whom God alone can save!

"'Ah! seest thou not yon grassy mound
There sleeps my mother dear.
Behold yon rock, above the flood;
There fell my father down!

"The whirling torrent bore him on;
He struggled long in vain;
My brother leaped to help his sire,
And both together sank!

"'And now I fly our silent hut,
Where desolation dwells,
To mourn upon this dreary bank,
And watch the wave and grave!'

'No longer grieve,' the stranger said,
'Thy heart shall ache no more;
A father and a brother too
To thee, poor lonely girl, I'll be!'

"He took her hand; he led her off;
In garments rich he clad the maid;
Before the altar promised love,
And blessed her life in happy home!"*

As Lenora was about beginning the last verse of her song De Vlierbeck appeared on the sill of the kitchen door, and the peasants instantly rose

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* This simple and popular ballad, known in the Campine as *The Orphan*, is sung by all classes to an air which is full of touching melody.

in alarm at the freedom with which they were sitting in the presence of their young mistress, listening to her songs; but the poor gentleman at once understood the meaning of her action, and with a gesture of approval signaled them to be quiet. As the last words died on his ear,—"I'm glad to see you amusing yourselves," said he; "but, now that the song is ended, I want your services in another quarter, my good woman."

Followed by Bess, the farmer's wife, he ascended to the dining-room, where the table-cloth was already laid and every thing in order for the reception of the dishes. Bessy's son was already there in livery, with a napkin over his arm; and De Vlierbeck immediately began to assign them their several tasks during the service of dinner, and to repeat and drill them in their tasks till he was perfectly satisfied with their performances.

The hour for dinner was at length near at hand. Every thing was ready in the kitchen, and all were at their posts. Lenora, in full dress and with a palpitating heart, lingered in her chamber; while her father, with a book which he appeared to be reading, sat beneath the *catalpa* in the garden.

It was about two o'clock when a splendid equipage, drawn by a pair of superb English horses, entered the demesne of Grinselhof and drew up in front of the portal. De Vlierbeck welcomed his guests courteously, and Monsieur Denecker gave orders to the coachman to return precisely at five o'clock, as matters of importance

required his presence in Antwerp before nightfall.

Denecker was a large, stout person, dressed rather extravagantly, but in a style of studied carelessness which he evidently regarded as stylish. The expression of his face, it must be owned, was rather vulgar, and exhibited a compound of cunning and good-nature tempered by indifference. But Gustave, his nephew, belonged to an entirely different class of persons. His tall figure was graceful and easy, his countenance frank and manly, and his whole demeanor denoted refined manners and high cultivation. Blue eyes and blonde hair imparted a poetic air to his head; but an energetic glance and lofty brow took from it every expression of sentimental weakness.

No sooner had De Vlierbeck presented his guests to Lenora, in the saloon, than Denecker broke forth in exclamations of undisguised admiration:—

"How charming, how beautiful she is! and yet so hidden in this Grinselhof of yours, Monsieur de Vlierbeck! What a shame, sir! what a shame!"

In the mean time Gustave and Lenora had moved off to a short distance from the old gentlemen, and were busy in a chat of their own, inaudible to the rest but evidently interesting to themselves, for they were observed not only to blush but tremble. Denecker, in fact, could not help observing the young people's emotion; and, as De

Vlierbeck passed down the saloon with him, remarked that the young beauty was evidently turning his nephew's head. "He talks of her constantly," said he, "and I don't know what may come of it; but I give you fair warning, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, if you are unwilling to see something more than compliments between these children you had better take time by the forelock. It will soon be too late to reason with them; for my nephew, with all his calm gentleness, is not the man to retreat before difficulties."

De Vlierbeck was secretly delighted by the merchant's counsels, but was too wise to display anxiety.

"You are joking, Monsieur Denecker," said he: "I can't think there is a particle of danger. They are both young, and there is nothing surprising in mutual attraction under such circumstances. There can hardly be any thing serious in their intercourse. But, come," added he, aloud; "I perceive that dinner is served; and so let us adjourn to the table!" Gustave led in the blushing girl, and the elders followed admiringly in their rear, while the merchant shook his finger coquettishly at his gallant nephew. De Vlierbeck placed Monsieur Denecker opposite him at table, and made Gustave the *vis-à-vis* of Lenora.

Bess brought in the dishes, while her son waited on the guests. The viands were prepared with considerable skill, and Denecker took frequent occasion to express his satisfaction with their

exquisite flavor. In truth, he was rather surprised at the sumptuousness of the repast; for he had been prepared to expect lenten fare in a household which was renowned throughout the neighborhood for its austere economy.

In a short time the conversation became general; and Lenora astonished Monsieur Denecker by the extent of her information and the admirable style in which she expressed herself and did the honors of the table. But, notwithstanding her ease and freedom while conversing with the uncle, an observer could not help detecting that she was shy, if not absolutely embarrassed, when obliged to reply to some casual remark of the nephew. Nor was Gustave more at ease than the maiden. In fact, they were both happy at heart because fate had thrown them together; but they would have been quite willing to enjoy that delicious silence which in love is often more eloquent than in language.

In the mean while De Vlierbeck rattled away, with the ease of a man of the world, on all subjects that might interest his guests; yet he listened, with equal good manners, to Denecker's conversation, and now and then adroitly threw in such hints as allowed him to speak learnedly upon commercial matters. The merchant was gratified by his deferential civility, and was drawn toward his entertainer by a stronger bond than that of mere social politeness.

Indeed, all went on swimmingly, and all were

pleased with themselves. De Vlierback was especially gratified to find that Bess and her boy performed their tasks so well, and that the spoons and plates were so quickly washed and brought back that it was impossible to notice the deficiency of their number. One thing alone began to worry him. He saw with pain that while Denecker was busy with his food and chat he was equally busy with the wine, and that glass after glass disappeared with more rapidity than was agreeable to his supply. Besides this, Gustave, who was probably anxious for some excuse to have a word with Lenora upon any pretext, constantly asked permission to fill her glass; so that, very soon after the soup and meat had been disposed of, the first bottle was entirely emptied.

Civility required that it should be immediately replaced; and, as De Vlierbeck observed that the more Monsieur Denecker talked the more he drank, he thought he might try whether less conversation would not moderate the merchant's thirst. But, alas! he was disappointed; for at that moment Denecker introduced the topic of wine, and, lauding the generous juice of the grape, expressed surprise at the extraordinary sobriety of his host. With this he redoubled his attack on the bottle, and was in some degree, though less vigorously, seconded by Gustave. De Vlierbeck's agony became more and more intense as he saw the rosy fluid sink and sink in the second bottle, until at length the last drop was drained into the merchant's glass.

"Yes," said Denecker, "your wine is both old and good; but I have always found, in tasting liquors, that if we don't change them we lose their flavor. I take it for granted that you have a first-rate cellar, if I may judge by your first samples; so I propose that we now try a bottle of your *Château-margaux;* and, if we have time, we can finish with a bottle of *hochheimer*. I never drink *champagne:* it is a bad liquor for wine-drinkers."

As the last words fell from Denecker, poor De Vlierbeck grew deadly pale, as his frightened spirit went rummaging through the cracks and crannies of his brain for some inspiration or expedient which might extricate him from his deep perplexity.

"*Château-margaux?*" inquired he, with a calm smile. "Certainly, sir, if you wish it." And then, turning to the lackey,—"John," said he, "bring a bottle of *Château-margaux:* you will find it in the third cellar on the left-hand side."

But the rustic stared at his master with gaping mouth, as if he had been addressed in one of the dead languages. Seeing the predicament, and mastering it rapidly,—

"Excuse me," said De Vlierbeck, rising; "he would not find it, I fear. I will be back in a moment."

Rushing into the kitchen, he seized the third and last bottle and descended to the cellar, where he stopped to draw breath and compose himself.

"*Château-margaux! hochheimer! champagne!*" ex-

claimed poor De Vlierbeck, "and not another drop of wine in my house but what is in this last bottle of claret! What *shall* I do? what *can* I do?" continued he, as he held the cobwebbed bottle in one hand and stroked his chin with the other. "But no matter: there's no time for reflection; the die is cast, and may God help me in my need!"

He ascended the stair, entered the dining-room with the corkscrew in the last cork, and found that during his absence Lenora had ordered fresh glasses on the table.

"This wine," said De Vlierbeck, holding the bottle knowingly to the light, "is at least twenty years old, Monsieur Denecker, and I sincerely hope it will please your palate." So saying, he filled the glasses of uncle and nephew, and gazed anxiously in their faces for the verdict.

Denecker tasted the wine, drop by drop, like an epicure, and, shaking his head disappointedly,—

"There's a mistake, doubtless," said he; "for it's the identical wine we had before."

De Vlierbeck feigned surprise admirably, tasted the wine in turn, and replied,—

"I *believe* you are right, and that I *have* made a mistake; yet, as the bottle is opened and not bad, suppose we drink it before I make another descent to the cellar? There's abundance of time."

"I've no objection," answered the merchant, "provided you help us, so as to get through it the quicker." And so the column in the third and

last bottle diminished more rapidly than its predecessors, till two or three glasses alone remained at the bottom to crown the festival.

Poor De Vlierbeck could no longer conceal his agitation. He tried to keep his eyes off the fatal bottle; but a sort of fascination drew him back to it, and each time with increased anxiety. That dreadful word '*Château-margaux*' rang in his ears. His face blushed and grew pale, and a cold, clammy sweat stood in big beads on his forehead. Yet he felt that he had not entirely exhausted his resources, and resolved to fight the battle of humiliation to the end. He wiped his brow and cheeks, coughed, and turned aside as if about to sneeze. By dint of these manœuvres he continued to conceal his nervousness till Denecker grasped the bottle to pour out its last drop. As he clasped the neck, a chill seized the hysterical frame of the poor gentleman, a deadly paleness overspread his features, and his head fell with a groan against the tall back of the chair. Was it in truth a fainting-fit, or did the sufferer take advantage of his emotion to play a part and escape the embarrassment of his situation?

In a moment the whole party were on their feet, while Lenora screamed and ran to her father.

"It's nothing," said De Vlierbeck, striving, after a minute or two, to rally himself. "I am faint; the confined air of this room overcame me. Let me walk a while in the garden and I will soon be better."

As he said this he staggered to his feet, and, supported by Lenora and Gustave, moved toward the garden, followed by Denecker with an expression of the deepest concern. A short rest in the open air beneath the shade of a noble chestnut-tree quickly restored a faint color to De Vlierbeck's cheek and enabled him to tranquillize their anxiety about his sudden attack.

"I will rest here a while out of doors," said he, "for fear the fit might return; and perhaps a slow walk in the garden might hasten my recovery."

"It will do both of us good," answered Denecker; "and, besides, as I have to quit you at five o'clock, I don't want to leave Grinselhof without seeing its garden. Let us take a turn through your walks, and afterward we shall have time enough to finish another bottle."

As he said this he passed Lenora's arm within his own, and, casting a coquettish glance at Gustave, began their promenade. By degrees De Vlierbeck rallied sufficiently to take part in the chat; and gardening, agriculture, sporting, and a hundred different country topics, were fully discussed. Lenora recovered her spirits and charmed their commercial guest by the mingled charms of her intellectual cleverness and innocent gayety. Wild as a deer, she dared him to run a race with her, and danced along the paths by his side full of mirth and sportiveness. In truth, Denecker was altogether captivated by the ingenuous girl, and, as he looked on her radiant face, could not

help thinking that the future had some happy days in store for his gallant nephew. After a while Lenora strayed off in advance with Gustave, while the two elders lingered lazily along the path. Gustave was charmed with the flowers, the plants, the gold-fish, which Lenora pointed out to him; nor was he at all desirous to shorten their delicious flirtation by returning to the table. This chimed precisely with the anxiety of De Vlierbeck, who employed every stratagem he could conceive to keep his guest in the open air. He told stories, repeated jokes, appealed to Denecker's commercial knowledge, and even quizzed him a little when he found their conversation beginning to flag. In fact, he was rejoicing that five o'clock, and, of course, the carriage, were rapidly approaching, when Denecker suddenly recalled his nephew from a distant quarter of the garden where he was strolling with Lenora.

"Come, Gustave; come," said he; "if you wish to drink a parting glass with us let us get in, for the coach will be here in a moment."

De Vlierbeck instantly became pale as a sheet, and, trembling from head to foot, stared silently at Denecker, who could no longer restrain his surprise at these exhibitions.

"Are you ill, sir?" said he.

"My stomach is a singular one, Monsieur Denecker, and I suffer spasms if you even mention *wine!* It is a strange malady; but—— Oh, I

hear your coach, Monsieur Denecker; and there it is, drawing up, I see, at the gateway."

Of course Denecker spoke no more of wine; but, as he could not help noticing the alacrity with which De Vlierbeck hailed the prospect of his departure, he would have been deeply mortified, if not offended, had not the previous hospitality of his host satisfied him of their welcome. He thought, perhaps, that he ought to attribute his entertainer's conduct to some singular nervous disease which he masked under an antipathy for wine; and accordingly he took leave with a warm and friendly farewell.

"I have passed a delightful afternoon with you, Monsieur De Vlierbeck," said he. "We have found ourselves, I am sure, extremely happy in your and your daughter's charming society. It is a pleasure added to my life to have made your acquaintance; and I hope that further intimacy may assure me your friendship. In the mean while, let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind reception."

As he finished the sentence, Lenora and Gustave joined them.

"My nephew," continued Denecker, "will confess, as I have done, that he has spent few happier hours than those that are just gone. I hope, Monsieur de Vlierbeck, that you and your charming daughter will return our visit and dine with us. Yet I shall have to ask your pardon for postponing the pleasure it will afford us till I re-

turn from Frankfort, where I am summoned, the day after to-morrow, on urgent business. It is probable I may be detained away a couple of months; but if my nephew should be allowed to visit you in my absence let me hope he will be welcome."

De Vlierbeck reiterated his professions of delight at the new acquaintance; Lenora was silent; and Denecker moved off toward the coach.

"But the parting glass, uncle!" exclaimed Gustave. "Let us go in for a moment and drink it."

"No, no," said Denecker, interrupting him tartly. "I believe we would never get hence at all if we listened to you. It is time to be off, and I can delay no longer. Adieu!"

Gustave and Lenora exchanged a long and anxious look, full of regret at separation and of hope for speedy reunion. In a moment the uncle and nephew were in the vehicle and the spirited horses in motion; but, as long as the group was in sight at the gate, a couple of white-gloved hands might have been seen waving farewells from the coach-window.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days after the departure of his uncle, Gustave paid a visit to Grinselhof. He was received by Monsieur De Vlierbeck and his daughter with their usual kindness, passed the greater part of an afternoon with them, and went home at nightfall to the *château* of Echelpoel full of delightful recollections and hopes. Either from a fear of disturbing the reserved habits of the old gentleman, or from a sense of politeness, Gustave did not at first repeat his visits too frequently; but after a couple of weeks the extreme cordiality of Vlierbeck dispelled all his scruples. The ardent youth no longer resisted an impulse that drew him toward the bewitching girl, nor did he allow a single day to roll by without passing the afternoon at Grinselhof. The happy hours flew rapidly on the wings of love. He strolled with Lenora through the shady walks of the old garden, listened to her father's observations on science and art, drank in the delicious notes of his loved one's voice as it was breathed forth in song, or, seated beneath the flowery and spreading catalpa, dreamed the dream of happiness that was in store for him with her who was probably soon to become his betrothed.

If the noble and beautiful face of the maiden had won his eye and enlisted his feelings the moment he first beheld her in the village churchyard, *now*, that he had become familiar with her character, his love grew so ardently absorbing that the world seemed sad and dead if she were not present to shed the light of her joyous spirit upon every thing around him. Neither religion nor poetry could conjure up an angel more fascinating than his beloved. Indeed, though God had endowed her person with all those feminine graces that adorned the first woman in Paradise, he had also lavished on her a heart whose crystalline purity was never clouded, and whose generosity burst forth with every emotion like a limpid spring.

But in all his interviews, Gustave had never yet been alone with Lenora. When he visited her she never left the apartment where she commonly sat with her father, unless the old gentleman expressed a wish that they should unite in a walk through the garden; and, of course, he had never enjoyed an opportunity to breathe the love that was rising to his lips. Still, he felt that it was altogether useless to express by words what was passing in their hearts; for the kindness, the respect, the affection, that shone in everybody's eyes, betokened the feeling which united them in a mingled sentiment of attachment and hope.

Though Gustave entertained profound veneration for Lenora's father and really loved him as a son, there was something which at times came like

a cloud betwixt himself and the old gentleman. What he heard outside of Grinselhof of De Vlierbeck's extraordinary avarice had been fully realized since he became intimate at the house. No one ever offered him a glass of wine or beer; he never received an invitation to dinner or supper; and he frequently observed the trouble that was taken by the master of the house to disguise his inhospitable economy.

Avarice is a passion which excites no other emotion than that of aversion or contempt, because it is natural to believe that when so degrading a vice takes possession of one's soul it destroys every spark of generosity and fills it with meanness. Accordingly, Gustave had a long and fearful conflict with himself in order to subdue this instinctive feeling and to convince his judgment that De Vlierbeck's conduct was only a caprice which did not detract from the native dignity of his character. And yet, had the young man known the truth, he would have seen that a pang was hidden beneath every smile that flitted over the old man's face, and that the nervous shudders which at times shook his frame were the results of a suppressed agony that almost destroyed him. As he gazed on the happy face of Lenora and steeped his soul in the intoxication of her love, he never dreamed that her father's life was a prolonged punishment; that, day and night, a terrible future opened its vista before him; and that each moment of his existence brought him nearer and

nearer to a dreadful catastrophe. He had not heard the inexorable sentence of the notary:—"Four months more and your bond expires, when all you possess in this world will be sold by the officers of justice to satisfy your creditors!"

Two of those fatal months had already expired!

If Monsieur De Vlierbeck appeared to encourage the young man's love, it was not alone in consequence of his sympathy with his feelings. No: the *dénouement* of his painful trial was to be developed within a defined period; and, if it proved inauspicious, there was nothing but dishonor and moral death for himself and child! Destiny was about to decide forever whether he was to come out victorious from this ten years' conflict with poverty, or whether he was to fall into the abyss of public contempt! These were the feelings that induced him to conceal his true position more carefully than ever, and, while he watched over the lovers like a guardian spirit, made him do nothing to check the rapid progress of their passion.

As the time of his uncle's return approached, the two months seemed to Gustave to have flown by like a pleasant dream; and, although he felt sure that his relative would not oppose the union, he foresaw that he would not be allowed hereafter to spend so much of his time away from business. Indeed, the very idea that he might be obliged to pass considerable periods without seeing Lenora

made him look for his uncle's return with any thing but delight.

One day he contrived to whisper his fears and anticipations to Lenora, and, for the first time since their acquaintance, saw tears gathering in her eyes. The girl's emotion touched his heart so sensibly that he ventured timidly to take her hand, and held it in his for a long time without uttering a word. De Vlierbeck, who had overheard the remark, tried to comfort him, but his words did not seem to produce the desired effect; and, after a short time, Gustave rose abruptly and took leave, though his usual time of departure had not yet arrived. Lenora read in his expression that some sudden revolution had occurred in her lover's mind, for his eyes glistened with extraordinary animation. She strove eagerly to retain him by her side; but he resisted her appeal pleasantly, and declared that nothing should unveil his secret till the following day, when he would return to Grinselhof. De Vlierbeck, however, was more familiar with the world than his daughter; and, imagining that he had penetrated the mystery of Gustave's conduct, many a pleasant dream hovered that night around his pillow.

As the usual hour of Gustave's visit approached next day, De Vlierbeck's heart beat high with hope; and when the visitor appeared, clad with unusual neatness and care, the old gentleman welcomed him with more than ordinary warmth. After the compliments of the day had been paid

to his ladylove, Gustave expressed a desire for a few moments' conversation with her father, who led him into an adjoining cabinet and seated himself by his side.

"What is it you wish of me, my young friend?" said he, kindly.

Gustave was silent for a moment, as if endeavoring to rally his ideas, and then spoke out in a manly way:—

"I am about, my dear sir, to speak to you in regard to a matter that concerns my happiness; and, no matter what may be your decision, I am sure, from your kindness upon all occasions, that you will pardon my boldness. I can hardly imagine that the feeling—the irresistible feeling—I have entertained for Lenora from the first moment I saw her, has escaped your penetrating eye. I ought probably to have asked your consent long ago, before she obtained so complete a dominion over my heart; but I have always secretly encouraged the belief that you read my soul and were not displeased with my motives."

Gustave was silent, awaiting the hoped-for words of encouragement; but De Vlierbeck only looked at him with a gentle smile, and gave no other indication of his pleasure. A motion of the hand, as if he wished the lover to go on with his conversation, was the only sign he made in reply.

Gustave's resolution began to ebb at this discouraging by-play; but, summoning all his energy for another attack, he continued:—

"Yes, sir, I have loved Lenora from my first sight of her; but what was then a spark is now a flame. Don't think it is her loveliness alone that bewitched me. She might indeed enchant the most insensible of mankind; but I found a far more glorious treasure in the angelic heart of your daughter. Her virtue, the immaculate purity of her soul, her gentle and magnanimous sentiments, —in a word, the prodigal gifts of mind and body which God has lavished on her,—have increased my admiration to love, my love to absolute idolatry! How dare I conceal my emotion from you any longer? I cannot live without Lenora; the very thought of even a short temporary separation from her overwhelms me with despair. I long to be with her every day, every hour; I long to hear her voice and read my happiness in her eloquent eyes! I know not what may be your decision; but, believe me, if it shall be adverse to my hopes, I shall not long survive the blow. If your decree separate me from my beloved Lenora, life will no longer have a charm for me!"

Gustave uttered his romantic rhapsody—the rhapsody of most lovers—with that genuine emotion which bespoke his sincerity, and touched the heart of De Vlierbeck so deeply that he grasped his hand and implored him to be calm.

"Don't tremble so, my young friend," said the old gentleman. "I know very well that you love Lenora, and that she is not insensible to your

affection for her. But what have you to propose to me?"

Gustave replied, dejectedly,—"If I still doubt your approval, after all the marks of esteem you have given me, it is because I fear you do not consider me worthy the happiness I have sought. I have no ancestral tree whose roots are buried in the past; the good deeds of my forefathers do not shine in history; the blood that runs in my veins comes from a common stock."

"Do you think," said De Vlierbeck, interrupting him, "that I was ignorant of all this from the first day of our acquaintance? No, Gustave; no matter what your lineage may be, your own heart is generous and noble; and, had it not been so, I would never have esteemed and treated you as my son."

"And so," exclaimed Gustave, catching at the last words with a burst of joyous impatience, "you don't refuse me Lenora's hand?—you will interpose no objection, provided my uncle gives his consent?"

"No," replied De Vlierbeck; "I shall not refuse it to you. On the contrary, it will give me unbounded happiness to intrust the fate of my only child to your keeping. And yet there is an obstacle of which you have no idea."

"An obstacle!" exclaimed Gustave, growing pale;—"an obstacle between Lenora and me?"

"Be silent a moment," said De Vlierbeck, "and listen to the explanation I shall give you. You

think, Gustave, I suppose, that Grinselhof and all its dependencies belong to us? It is not so: we are penniless. We are poorer far than the peasant who rents our farming-land and lives yonder at the gate!"

Gustave looked doubtingly at De Vlierbeck, with so incredulous a smile that the poor gentleman blushed, and trembled like an aspen.

"I see you do not believe me," continued he; "I see it in your smile and look. Like the rest of them, you think me a miser, hiding my wealth and starving my child and myself to amass riches,—a wretch who sacrifices every thing for money,—a vagabond whom all ought to fear and despise!"

"Oh, pardon me, pardon me, sir!" interrupted Gustave, moved by the excitement of the old man. "I think nothing of the kind! My veneration for you is unbounded!"

"Nay, don't be frightened at my words, young man," continued De Vlierbeck, in a calmer tone. "I make no accusations against you, Gustave. I only saw in your incredulous smile that I had succeeded in masking my poverty even from you, and in making you suppose that my economy was avarice. But it is needless for me to give you any further explanation just now. Let it suffice you to know that what I say is strictly, honestly true. I possess nothing,—nothing!"

"And now," added he, after a moment's silence on both sides, "let me give you a piece of advice.

Go home to-day without seeing Lenora; examine your soul calmly, and see whether there are no secret emotions that may make you change your present views; let a night pass, and if, to-morrow, Lenora, poor as you now know her to be, is still dear to you,—if you still think you can be happy with her and can make her happy,—seek your uncle and ask his consent. Here is my hand: if the day shall ever come when I can offer it as a father's, it will be the happiest of my life!"

Although the revelation made by Monsieur De Vlierbeck was astonishing to Gustave, the solemn tone in which he announced it convinced the lover of its truth. He was silent for a moment; but soon a spark of enthusiasm began to glisten in his eye and light up his face, as he exclaimed,—

"How can you ask me if I shall continue to love Lenora now that I know her to be poor? It will be happiness enough for me to receive her as a wife, to be bound to her by the eternal bonds of love, to be forever within her reach, and to receive my happiness from her look and voice! What delight it will be for me to protect her and know that I have the privilege of working for her! Palace or hovel; riches or poverty, all are equally indifferent to me, provided her presence animates the spot! A night's reflection, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, cannot change my resolution. Grant me Lenora's hand, and I will thank you on my knees for the priceless gift!"

"And suppose I do," replied the old gentle-

man; "generosity and constancy are natural to the ardent character of youth:—but your uncle?"

"My uncle!" murmured Gustave, with evident grief; "that is true; I need his consent. All I possess or ever shall possess in the world depends on his affection for me. I am the orphan son of his brother. He adopted me as his child and has overwhelmed me with kindness. He has the right to decide my lot in life, and I must obey him."

"And do you think that he, a merchant, who probably places a very high value on money, because experience has taught him its value, will say, like you, 'Palace or hovel, poverty or wealth, it makes no difference'?"

"Alas! I know not, Monsieur De Vlierbeck," said Gustave, droopingly. "But my uncle is so good to me—so extraordinarily good—that I may rightly hope for his consent. He will return to-morrow. When I embrace him I will declare all my wishes. I will say my comfort, my happiness, my life, depend on his consent. I know that he loves Lenora sincerely; for, before his departure, he even seemed to encourage my pretensions to her hand. Your disclosures will undoubtedly surprise him; but my prayers will conquer: believe it!"

Monsieur De Vlierbeck rose, to put an end to the conversation.

"Well, ask your uncle's consent," said he; "and, if your hopes are realized, let him come here and consult about the marriage. Whatever

may be the issue of this affair, Gustave, you at least have always behaved toward us with the delicacy of a generous youth. My esteem and friendship shall always be yours. Go now; quit Grinselhof this time without seeing Lenora, for you ought not to meet her until this affair is settled. I will tell her myself whatever I think proper for her to know."

Half pleased, half sad,—his heart divided between joy and anxiety,—Gustave bade farewell to Lenora's father and returned to Echelpoel.

CHAPTER V.

On the afternoon of the following day Monsieur De Vlierbeck was seated in his parlor, his head resting on his hand. He seemed plunged in profound thought, for his eyes were fixed on vacancy and his face exhibited by turns contentment and hope, inquietude and anxiety.

Occasionally Lenora came into the apartment, and, seeming unusually restless, wandered about from spot to spot, arranging and rearranging the little fancy articles upon the tables, looking out of the window into the garden, and at last running down-stairs suddenly as if she were pursued. No one who saw her could doubt that she was ner-

vously anxious about something; yet her expression was one of joy and hope. Had she been able to penetrate her father's mind and behold the various emotions that excited it, she would not perhaps have been so gay and blithesome; but poor De Vlierbeck restrained himself with his habitual care in her presence, and smiled at her impatience as if he too were confident of approaching happiness.

At length, tired of running about, Lenora seated herself by her father and fixed her clear and questioning gaze on his face.

"Don't be so excited, my good child," said he. "We shall know nothing to-day; but we may, perhaps, to-morrow. Moderate your joy, my daughter; if it please Heaven to decide against your hope in this matter your grief will be more easily conquered."

"Oh, no, father!" stammered Lenora; "God will grant my prayer; I feel it in my heart. Don't be astonished, father, that I am full of joy, for I think I see Gustave speaking to his uncle. I hear what he says, and Monsieur Denecker's replies; I see him embrace Gustave and give his consent! Who can doubt, father, that I ought to hope, when I know that Monsieur Denecker loved me and was always kind?"

"Would you be very happy, Lenora," asked De Vlierbeck, with a smile, "if Gustave were betrothed to you?"

"Never to leave him!" cried Lenora,—"to love

him,—to be the happiness of his life, his consolation, his joy,—to enliven the solitude of Grinselhof by our love!—ah! that, father, would be delight indeed; for then there would be two of us to contribute to the pleasures of your life! Gustave would have more skill than I to chase away the grief that sometimes clouds your brow; you could walk, talk, or hunt with him; he would venerate and love you as a son and watch you with the tenderest care; his only thought on earth would be to make you happy, because he knows that your happiness is mine; and I—I, father, will recompense him for his devotion by the gratitude of my heart, and love. Oh, yes, dear father! we shall live together in a paradise of contentment!"

"Ingenuous girl!" exclaimed De Vlierbeck, with a sigh; "may the Lord hear your prayer! But the world, my child, is governed by laws and customs of which you are altogether ignorant. A wife must follow her husband wherever he goes. If Gustave shall select another residence you must follow him and console yourself gradually at the separation from your father. Under other circumstances, parting might be painful; but solitude will not sadden me if I know you are happy, my child."

The startled maiden looked at her father with surprise as he uttered these words; and, as he finished, her head fell heavily on her breast and tears streamed silently from her eyes. Monsieur

De Vlierbeck took her hand tenderly as he said, in faltering words,—

"I feared, Lenora, that I would make you sad; but you must become accustomed to the idea of our separation."

Lenora raised her head quickly as she replied, in a firm and resolute manner, "What! could Gustave ever dream of our separation? To leave you at Grinselhof passing your days in seclusion while I and my husband were in the world in the midst of festivity? I should not have an instant's rest, wherever I might be; conscience would cry aloud in my heart, 'Ungrateful and insensible child, thy father is abandoned to suffering and solitude!' Yes, I love Gustave; he is dearer to me than life itself, and I receive his hand as a blessing from God; but if he should say to me, 'Abandon your father!'—if he left me no choice except you or him,—I would close my eyes and reject him! I should be sad; I should suffer; perhaps even I should die; but, father dear, I would die in your arms!"

She bent down her head for a moment as if oppressed by a dreadful thought; but, raising her large eyes, liquid with tears, she fixed them on her father, as she added,—

"You doubt Gustave's affection for you; you imagine him capable of filling your life with sorrow,—of separating me from you! Oh, father, you do not know him; you do not know how much he respects and loves you; you do not comprehend the warmth of his generous and loving heart!"

De Vlierbeck bent over his child and impressed a kiss on her forehead, as he was about to utter some words of consolation, when suddenly Lenora sprang from his arms and pointed eagerly to the window, as if listening to approaching sounds.

The noise of wheels and the clatter of horses on the road soon gave Monsieur De Vlierbeck to understand why his daughter had been so startled. His face assumed a more animated expression, and, descending hurriedly, he reached the door as Monsieur Denecker alighted from his coach.

The merchant seemed in exceedingly good humor; he grasped De Vlierbeck's hand, expressing his delight at seeing him once more. "How goes it with you, my old friend? It seems that rogue, my nephew, has taken advantage of my absence." And, although De Vlierbeck ushered him into the saloon with all the formality imaginable, Denecker slapped him familiarly on the shoulder, and continued,—

"Well! well! we were good friends from the beginning; and now I understand we are to be regular gossips:—at least I hope so. That scamp hasn't bad taste, I must confess. He would have to make a long search before he found a handsomer or more amiable woman than Lenora. Look you, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, we must have a wedding frolic that people will talk of twenty years hence!"

By this time they had got into the saloon and taken their seats; but De Vlierbeck, nervous as

he was, had considerable doubt as to the tone of Denecker's remarks, and whether he was jesting or serious.

"It seems," continued Denecker, assuming a graver tone, "that Gustave is madly impatient for this union, and begs me to hasten it. I have taken compassion on the young fellow and left all the business of our house topsy-turvy to-day to arrange matters with you. He tells me you have given your consent. That was kind of you, sir. I thought a great deal of this affair during my journey, for I had observed that Cupid's arrows had gone clean through and through the boy; yet I had fears about your consent. Inequality of blood, old-fashioned ideas, might perhaps interfere."

"And so Gustave told you that I consented to his marriage with Lenora?" said the old gentleman, paying no attention to Monsieur Denecker's remarks.

"Did he deceive me, sir?" said Denecker, with surprise.

"No; but did he communicate something else to you, which ought to strike you as of equal importance?"

Denecker threw back his head with a laugh, as he replied,—

"What nonsense you made him believe! But, between us two, that passes for nothing. He tells me that Grinselhof don't belong to you and that you are *poor!* I hope, Monsieur De Vlierbeck,

you have too good an opinion of my sense to imagine I have the least faith in such a story?"

A shudder passed over the poor gentleman's frame. Denecker's good-humored familiarity had made him believe that he knew and credited all, and nevertheless responded to his nephew's hopes; but the last words he heard taught him that he must again go over the sad recital of his misfortunes.

"Monsieur Denecker," said he, "do not entertain the least doubt, I beg you, in regard to what I am about to say. I am willing instantly to consent that my daughter shall become your nephew's wife; but I solemnly declare that I am poor,—frightfully poor!"

"Come, come!" cried the merchant; "we knew long, long ago that you were mightily fond of your money; but when you marry your *only* child you must open your heart and your purse, my dear sir, and portion her according to your means. They say—pardon me for repeating it—that you are *a miser;* but what a shame it would be to let your only daughter leave your house unprovided for!"

Poor De Vlierbeck writhed on his chair as Denecker poured forth his incredulous jokes. "For God's sake, sir," cried he, "spare me these bitter remarks. I declare, on the word of a gentleman, that I possess *nothing* in the world!"

"Well!" cried the merchant, taking no heed of his remarks, and with a mocking smile,

"come; let us cipher the matter out on the table. You suppose, perhaps, that I have come here to ask some great sacrifice of you: but no, De Vlierbeck, thank God, I have no occasion to be so close in my calculations. Yet a marriage is a thing to which there are always two parties, and it is just that each should bring something into the common stock."

"Oh, God! oh, God!" muttered the poor gentleman, as he clenched his hands convulsively.

"I propose to give my nephew one hundred thousand francs," continued Denecker; "and if he wants to continue in business my credit will be worth as much more to him. I have no wish that Lenora's portion shall equal his. Your high birth, and especially your character, will make up what is wanting in her fortune; but what say you to the half,—fifty thousand francs? You will consent to that, or I am much mistaken. What say you? Is it a bargain?"

Pale and trembling, De Vlierbeck sat riveted to his chair; but at last, in a low, melancholy voice,—

"Monsieur Denecker," said he, "this conversation kills me. I beg you to stop this infliction. I repeat that I possess *nothing;* and, since you force me to speak before you apprize me of your own intentions, know that Grinselhof and its dependencies are mortgaged beyond their value! It is useless to inform you of the origin of these debts. Let it suffice to repeat that I tell the

truth; and I beg you, without going further, now that you are informed of the state of my affairs, to declare frankly what are your designs as to your nephew's marriage."

Although this declaration was made with that feverish energy which ought to have satisfied Denecker of its truth, it nevertheless failed to convince him. A degree of surprise displayed itself on the merchant's face; but he continued his observations in the same incredulous tone:—

"Pardon me, De Vlierbeck, but it is impossible to believe you. I did not think you were so hard in a bargain. Yet be it so: every man has his weakness; one is too miserly, another too prodigal. Now, for my part, I confess that I am extremely anxious to spare Gustave the anxiety of delay. Give your daughter twenty-five thousand francs, with the understanding that the amount of her portion is to remain a secret; for I don't want to be laughed at. Twenty-five thousand francs!—you cannot say it is too much;—in fact, it is a trifle that will hardly pay for their furniture. Be reasonable, my good sir, and let us shake hands on it!"

De Vlierbeck said nothing; but, rising abruptly from the table, opened a closet with a trembling hand, and, taking from it a package of papers, threw them on the table.

"There!" said he; "read; convince yourself."

Denecker took up the papers and began to examine them. As he went on, the expression

of his face gradually changed, and at times he raised his head and looked upward, as if in deep thought. After he had been engaged for some time in this disagreeable task, De Vlierbeck recommenced the conversation in a tone of cutting irony:—

"Ah! you would not believe me, sir. Well, let your determination be founded on those papers alone. It is right you should know every thing; for I have determined never again to be tortured. Besides the evidences of debt which are before you, I owe a bill of exchange for four thousand francs, which I cannot pay! You see now, Monsieur Denecker, that I am worse than poor, for I have debts!"

"Alas! it is but too true," said the stupefied merchant; "you have indeed nothing! I see by these documents that my notary is also yours; and, although I spoke to him of your fortune, he left me unadvised, or, I should rather say, in error."

De Vlierbeck breathed more freely, for he felt as if a rock had fallen from his breast. His face resumed its ordinary calmness; and, seating himself, he continued:—

"Now, sir, if you have no longer any reason to doubt my poverty, let me ask what are your intentions."

"My intentions?" replied the merchant; "my intentions are that we shall remain as good friends as we were before; but, as to the mar-

riage, that of course falls to the ground. We will speak no more about it. What were *your* calculations, Monsieur De Vlierbeck? I think I am just beginning to see a little clearly into this matter! You imagined, I suppose, that you would make a good business out of it and sell your merchandise as high as possible!"

"Sir," exclaimed De Vlierbeck, bounding from his chair in rage, "speak respectfully of my daughter! Poor or rich, do not dare to forget who she is!"

"Don't get angry! don't get angry! Monsieur De Vlierbeck. I have no desire to insult you. Far from it. Had your enterprise succeeded I would probably have admired you; but *finesse* against *finesse* always makes a bad game! Permit me to ask, since you are so touchy on the point of honor, if you have acted a very honorable part in courting my nephew and allowing his passion to absorb him?"

De Vlierbeck bowed his head to conceal the blush that suffused his aged cheeks; nor did he awake from his painful stupor till the merchant recalled him by the single word,—

"Well?"

"Ah!" stammered De Vlierbeck, "have mercy on me! Love for my child, probably, led me astray. God endowed her with all the gifts that can adorn a woman. I hoped that her beauty, the purity of her soul, the nobility of her blood, were treasures quite as precious as gold!"

"That is to say, for a gentleman, perhaps; but not for so common a person as a merchant," interrupted Monsieur Denecker, with a sneer.

"Don't reproach me with having *courted* your nephew," continued De Vlierbeck. "That is a word that wounds me deeply; for it is unjust. Their attachment was reciprocal and in every way unstudied. I thanked God daily in my prayers that he had cast in our path a savior for my child:—yes, a savior, I say; for Gustave is an honorable youth, who would have made her happy not so much by money as by his noble and generous character. Is it then so great a crime for a father who has unfortunately become poor to hope that his child should escape want?"

"Certainly not," replied the merchant; "but every thing is in *success;* and in that respect, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, your enterprise has been unfortunate. I am a man who examines his goods twice before he buys, and it is difficult to pass apples on me for lemons!"

This heartless, trafficking slang tortured the unfortunate bankrupt to such a degree that he arose from his seat in a passion and began to pace the apartment.

"You have no consideration for my misfortunes, sir," said he. "You pretend that I designed deceiving you; but was it *you* who discovered my poverty? Are you not free to act as you please, after the disclosures that I have voluntarily given

you? And let me remark, sir, that if I listen humbly to your reproaches — if I even acknowledge my fault — the sense of manhood is not dead in my soul. You talk of 'merchandise' and 'goods,' as if you came here to buy something! You allude to my Lenora, do you? All your wealth, sir, could not purchase her! and, if love is not powerful enough in your eyes to obliterate the pecuniary inequality between us, know that I am a De Vlierbeck, and that name, even in poverty, weighs more than all your money!"

During this explosion his face kindled with indignation and his eyes shot forth their fiery rays upon the merchant, who, alarmed by the loud words and animated gestures of De Vlierbeck, regarded him with an air of stupefaction from the other side of the apartment.

"Good God, sir," said he at last, "there is no need of so much violence and loud talk! Each of us remains where he is; each keeps what he has, and the affair is at an end. I have but one request to make of you, and it is that you will never again receive my nephew,—or else——"

"Or else?" interrupted De Vlierbeck, passionately; "do you *dare* to threaten me?" But, restraining himself almost instantly, he continued, with comparative calmness, "Enough! Shall I call Monsieur Denecker's carriage?"

"If you please," replied the merchant. "We can-

not do business together, it seems; but that is no reason why we should become enemies."

"Well! well! we will stop short of that, sir. But this conversation annoys me; it must end!" And, so saying, he led Monsieur Denecker to the door and bade him farewell abruptly. De Vlierbeck returned to the parlor, fell into his chair and covered his brow with both hands, as a heavy groan burst from his breast, which heaved with almost hysterical emotion. For a long time he remained silent and motionless; but soon his hands fell heavily on his knees, a deathly paleness overspread his face, and the room whirled around the heart-broken man.

Suddenly he heard footsteps in the chamber above, and, rousing himself by a strong effort, "Oh, God! my poor child!" cried he; "my poor Lenora! She comes! my punishment is not yet complete! I must break the heart of my own child; I must tear from it all its hopes, blot out its dream, behold it withered up with grief! Oh that I could escape this dreadful disclosure! Alas! What to say to her? how to explain it?"

A bitter smile contracted his lips as he continued, with bitter irony:—"Ah! hide thy suffering, old man; rally thy strength; take courage! If thy heart is torn and bleeding,—if despair devours thy soul,—oh, smile, still smile! Yes! your life has been a continual farce! Yet, miserable abortion that thou art, what canst thou do but submit,

yield without a fight, and bow thy neck to the yoke like a powerless slave? Begone, rebellious feeling! Be silent, and behold thy child!"

Lenora opened the door and ran to her father, her questioning eyes fixed on his with a look of hope. All of poor De Vlierbeck's efforts to disguise his suffering were unsuccessful, and Lenora soon read in his face that he was a prey to some overwhelming sorrow. As he still obstinately kept silence, she began to tremble, and asked, with feverish impatience,—

"Well, father,—well,—have you *nothing* to say to me?"

"Alas! my child," said he, sighing, "we are not happy. God tries us with heavy blows. Let us bow before the will of the Almighty."

"What do you mean? what is there to fear?" said Lenora, beside herself. "Speak, father! Has he *refused* his consent?"

"He has refused it, Lenora!"

"Oh, no! no!" cried the maiden; "it is impossible!"

"Refused it, because he possesses millions and we—nothing!"

"It is true, then? Gustave is hopelessly lost to me!—lost to me forever!

"Hopelessly!" echoed the father.

A sharp cry escaped Lenora as she tottered to the table and fell on it, weeping bitterly.

De Vlierbeck arose and stood above his sobbing

daughter, and, joining his uplifted hands, exclaimed, in suppliant tones,—

"Oh, pity me, pity me, Lenora! In that fatal interview I have suffered all the torments that could rack the heart of a parent; I have drunk the dregs of shame; I have emptied the cup of humiliation; but all, all are nothing in comparison with thy grief! Calm yourself, child of my love; let me see the sweet face I so love to look on; let me regain my lost strength in thy holy resignation! Lenora! my head swims; I shall die of despair!"

As he uttered these words he sank heavily into a chair, overpowered by emotion. The sound of his fall seemed instantly to recall Lenora to herself, and, dashing the tears from her eyes, she leaned her head on his shoulder to listen and assure herself that he had not fainted.

"Never to see him more! to renounce his love forever! to lose the happiness I dreamed of! Alas! alas!"

"Lenora! Lenora!" exclaimed her father, entreatingly!

"Oh, beloved father," sobbed the poor girl, "to lose Gustave *forever!* The dreadful thought overwhelms me! While I am near you I will bless God for his kindness; but my tears overpower me; oh! let me weep, let me weep, I beseech you!"

De Vlierbeck pressed his daughter more closely to his heart, and respected her affliction in silence.

The stillness of death reigned throughout the

apartment, while they remained locked in each other's arms until the very excess of grief relaxed their embrace and opened their hearts to mutual consolation

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CHAPTER VI.

Four days after Denecker had refused his consent to the marriage, a hired carriage might have been seen drawing up carefully in a screen of wood that bordered a by-road about half a league from Grinselhof. A young man got out of it, and, giving directions to the coachman to await him at a neighboring inn, walked briskly across the moor toward the old *château*. As soon as Grinselhof began to loom up over the trees, he moved cautiously along behind the hedges and thickets, as if seeking to avoid observation; and then, stealing across the bridge, he opened the gate, passed through the dense copse that surrounded the house, and entered the garden.

The first object that greeted his sight was Lenora, seated at her table beneath the well-known catalpa, with her head resting on the board, evidently absorbed in sorrow. Her back was turned toward him as he approached; and, although he advanced with the utmost caution,

the sound of his footsteps disturbed her in the intense silence of the spot, and she leaped to her feet, while the name of Gustave broke in surprised accents from her lips. She was evidently anxious to escape into the house; but her lover threw himself on his knees, and, grasping her hand, poured forth a passionate appeal:—

"Listen to me, Lenora! listen to me! If you fly and refuse me the consolation of telling you, with my last farewell, all I have suffered and all I hope, I will either die here at your feet, or I will go hence forever, a broken-hearted wanderer over the face of the earth! Listen to me! listen to me! Listen to me, Lenora, my sister, my beloved, my betrothed! By our pure and holy love, I beseech you not to repulse me!"

Though Lenora trembled in every limb, her features assumed an expression of wounded pride, as she answered, with cold decision,—

"Your boldness surprises me, sir! You are indeed a daring man, to appear again at Grinselhof after your uncle's insulting conduct to my father! He is ill in bed; his soul is crushed by the outrage. Is this the reward of all my affection for you?"

"Oh, God! oh, God! Lenora, do I hear *you* accuse me? Alas! what have I done, and what could I prevent?"

"There is nothing, sir, any longer, in common between us," said the girl. "If we are not as rich as you, the blood that runs in our veins cannot

suffer by comparison. Arise! begone! I will see you no more!"

"Mercy! pity!" exclaimed Gustave, lifting his clasped hands toward her; "mercy, Lenora, for I am innocent!"

The maiden dashed away the tears that began to start in her eyes, and, turning her back on him, was about to depart

"Cruel, cruel!" exclaimed Gustave, in broken tones. "Can you leave me without a farewell?—without a word of consolation? Will you remain insensible to my grief and deaf to my prayers? 'Tis well; I will submit to my lot, for *you* have decided it! You, Lenora, my love, have sentenced me! I forgive you: be happy on earth without me, and farewell forever!"

As he uttered these words his strength seemed utterly to fail him, and, sinking into the chair which Lenora had quitted, his head and arms fell lifeless on the table.

The determined girl had made a few steps in her retreat to the house, when she suddenly halted on hearing the agonized tones of Gustave's farewell and the sudden sound of his fall on the table. As she glanced backward at the convulsed frame of her lover, a spasm that denoted the violent conflict between duty and affection passed over her beautiful face; and, as her heart appeared gradually to conquer in the fight, the tears began to pour in showers from her eyes. Step by step and slowly she retraced the path to the table, and,

leaning over the sufferer, took one of his hands tenderly in hers:—

"Are we not wretched, Gustave? Are we not wretched?"

At the touch of that gentle hand and the sound of that beloved voice, life seemed once more to stir in his veins, and, raising his eyes languidly to hers, he gazed mournfully into them as he half said, half sighed,—

"Lenora, dear Lenora, have you come back to me? Have you taken pity on my agony? You do not *hate* me, do you?'

"Is a love like ours extinguished in a day?" returned Lenora, with a sigh.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Gustave aloud; "it is eternal! Is it not eternal, Lenora, and omnipotent against every ill as long as the hearts beat in our bosoms?"

Lenora bowed her head and cast down her eyes.

"Do not imagine, Gustave," said she, solemnly, "that our separation causes me less grief than it does you; and, if the assurance of my love can assuage the pangs of absence, let it strengthen and encourage you. My lonely heart will keep your image sacred in its holiest shrine; I will follow you in spirit wherever you go, and I will love you till death shall fill up the gulf that separates us. We shall meet again above, but never more on earth."

"You are mistaken, Lenora," cried Gustave, with a feeble expression of joy; "you are mis-

taken! There is still hope; my uncle is not inexorable, and his compassionate heart must yield to my despair."

"That may be," replied Lenora, in sad but resolute tones; "that may be, Gustave; but my father's honor is inflexible. Leave me, Gustave; I have already disobeyed my father's orders too long, and slighted my duty in remaining with a man who cannot become my husband. Go now; for, if we should be surprised by some one, my poor, wretched father would die of shame and anger."

"One moment more, beloved Lenora! Hear what I have to tell you. My uncle refused me your hand; I wept, I besought him, but nothing could change his determination. In despair I was transported beyond myself; I rebelled against my benefactor; and, treating him like an ungrateful wretch, I said a thousand things for which I begged his pardon on my knees when reason resumed her empire over my excited soul. My uncle is goodness itself to me: he pardoned my sin; but he imposed the condition that I should instantly undertake a journey with him to Italy, which he has long designed making. He idly hopes that travel may obliterate your image from my mind; but think not, Lenora, that I can ever forget you! A sudden thought flashed through my fancy, and I accepted his terms with a secret joy. For months and months I will be alone with my uncle; and, watching him ever with the

love and gratitude I feel for all his kindness, I will gradually wear away his objections, and, conquering his heart, return, my love, to place the bridal wreath upon your brow, and claim you, before the altar of God, as the companion of my choice!"

For an instant a gentle smile overspread the maiden's face, and her clear, earnest gaze was full of rapture at the vision of future happiness; but the gleam disappeared almost as quickly as it arose, and she answered him, with bitter sadness,—

"Alas! my dear friend, it is cruel to destroy this last hope of your heart; and yet I must do it. Your uncle might consent; but my father——" She faltered for an instant.

"Your father, Lenora? Your father would pardon all and receive me like a long-lost son."

"No, no; believe it not, Gustave; for his honor has been too deeply wounded. As a Christian he might pardon it; but as a gentleman he will never forget the outrage."

"Oh, Lenora, you are unjust to your father. If I return with my uncle's consent, and say to him, 'I will make your child happy; give her to me for my wife; I will surround her path with all the joys a husband has ever bestowed on woman;'—if I tell him this, think you he will deny me?"

Lenora cast down her eyes.

"You know his infinite goodness, Gustave," said she. "My happiness is his only thought on earth; he will thank God and bless you."

"Yes, yes; he *will* consent," continued Gustave, with ardor; "and all is not lost. A blessed ray lightens our future, and let it rekindle your hope, beloved of my heart! Yield not to grief; let me go forth on this dreary journey, but let me bear along with me the assurance that you await my return with trust in God. Remember me in your prayers; utter my name as you stray through these lonely paths which witnessed the dawn of our love and where for two months I drained the cup of perfect bliss. The knowledge that I am not forgotten by you will sustain my heart and enable me to endure the pangs of separation."

Lenora wept in silence. Her lover's eloquence had extinguished every spark of her pride; and the rebellious heart which so lately was ready to cast off its rosy fetters had no longer a place for any thing but love and sadness. Gustave saw that he had conquered.

"I go, Lenora," said he, "strong in your affection. I quit my country and my loved one with a confident hope. Whatever may happen to me, I will never be downcast. You will think of me daily, Lenora, will you not?"

"Alas! I have promised my father that I will forget you!" sobbed the maiden, as her hand trembled in his.

"*Forget* me!" exclaimed Gustave. "*Can* you force yourself to forget me?"

"No, Gustave; NO!" said she, firmly, fixing her large eyes on him with an intense and lingering

gaze. "No: for the first time in my life I will disobey my father. I feel that I have not the strength to keep my idle word. I cannot forget you: till the last hour of my life I will love you; for it is my fate, and I cannot resist."

"Thanks, thanks, a thousand thanks, Lenora!" exclaimed Gustave, in a transport. "Thy tender love strengthens me against destiny. Beloved of my heart, rest here under the guardian eye of God. Thy image will follow me in my journey like a protecting angel; in joy and grief, by day and night, in health and sickness, thou, Lenora, wilt ever be present to me! This cruel separation wounds my heart beyond expression; but duty commands, and I must obey. Farewell, farewell!"

He wrung her hands convulsively, and was gone.

"Gustave!" sobbed the poor girl, as she sank on the chair and allowed the pent-up passion of her soul to burst forth in tears.

CHAPTER VII.

Lenora secretly cherished in her heart the hope of a happy future; but she did not hesitate to inform her father of Gustave's visit. De Vlierbeck

heard her listlessly, and gave no other reply but a bitter smile.

From that day Grinselhof became sadder and more solitary than ever. The old gentleman might generally be seen seated in an arm-chair, resting his forehead on his hand, while his eyes were fixed on the ground or on vacancy. The fatal day on which the bond fell due was perhaps always present to his mind; nor could he banish the thought of that frightful misery into which it would plunge his child and himself. Lenora carefully concealed her own sufferings in order not to increase her father's grief; and, although she fully sympathized with him, no effort was omitted on her part to cheer the old man by apparent contentment. She did and said every thing that her tender heart could invent to arouse the sufferer from his reveries; but all her efforts were in vain: her father thanked her with a smile and caress; but the smile was sad, the caress constrained and feeble.

If Lenora sometimes asked him, with tears, what was the cause of his depression, he adroitly managed to avoid all explanations. For days together he wandered about the loneliest paths of the garden, apparently anxious to escape the presence even of his daughter. If she caught a glimpse of him at a distance, a fierce look of irritation was perceptible on his face, while his arms were thrown about in rapid and convulsive gesticulations. If she approached him with marks

of love and devotion, he scarcely replied to her affectionate words, but left the garden to bury himself in the solitude of the house.

An entire month—a month of bitter sadness and unexpressed suffering on both sides—passed in this way; and Lenora observed with increased anxiety the rapid emaciation and pallor of her father, and the suddenness with which his once-lively eye lost every spark of its wonted vivacity. It was about this time that a slight change in the old gentleman's conduct convinced her that a secret—and perhaps a terrible one—weighed on his heart. Every day or two he went to Antwerp in the *calèche*, without informing her or any one else of the object of his visit. He came back to Grinselhof late at night, seated himself at the supper-table silent and resigned, and, persuading Lenora to go to bed, soon went off to his own chamber. But his daughter was well aware that he did not retire to rest; for during long hours of wakefulness she heard the floor creak as he paced his apartment with restless steps.

Lenora was brave by nature, and her singular and solitary education had given her a latent force of character that was almost masculine. By degrees the resolution to make her father reveal his secret grew in her mind. And, although a feeling of instinctive respect made her hesitate, a restless devotion to the author of her being gradually overcame all scruples and emboldened her for the enterprise.

One day Monsieur De Vlierbeck set off very early for town. The morning wore away heavily; and, toward the afternoon, Lenora wandered wearily about the desolate house, with no companion but her sad reflections. At length she entered the apartment where her father usually studied or wrote, and, after a good deal of hesitation, in which her face and gestures displayed the anxiety of her purpose, opened the table-drawer, and saw in it, unrolled, a written document. The paleness of death overspread her countenance as she perused the paper and instantly closed the drawer. After this she left the apartment hastily, and, returning to her chamber, sat down with hands clasped on her knees and eyes fixed on the floor in a stare of wild surprise.

"*Sell Grinselhof!*" exclaimed she. "Sell Grinselhof! Why? Monsieur Denecker insulted my father because we were not rich enough for him. What is this secret? and what does it all mean? If it should be *true* that we are beggars! Oh, God! does a ray of light penetrate my mind? is this the solution of the enigma and the cause of my father's depression?"

For a long time she remained motionless in her chair, absorbed in reverie; but gradually her face brightened, her lips moved, and her eyes glistened with resolution. As she was endeavoring to fight bravely against misfortune, she suddenly heard the wheels of her father's *calèche* returning to Grinselhof. She ran down instantly to meet him; and

as he drew up at the door she perceived the poor sufferer buried in a corner of the vehicle, apparently deprived of all consciousness; and, when he descended from the vehicle and she saw his expression distinctly, the deadly pallor that covered his haggard cheeks almost made her sink to the earth with anxiety. Indeed, she had neither heart nor strength to utter a word to him; but, standing aside in silence, she allowed the old man to enter the house and bury himself as usual in his chamber.

For some minutes she stood on the door-sill, undecided as to what she should do; but by degrees her brow and cheeks began to redden, and the light of resolution shone in her moistened eyes.

"Ought the feeling of respect to restrain me longer?" said she to herself; "shall I let my father die without an effort? No! no! I must know all! I must tear the worm from his heart; I must save him by my love!"

Without a moment's further delay, she ran rapidly through three or four chambers, and came to the apartment where her father was seated with his elbows resting on the table and his head buried in his hands. Throwing herself on her knees at his feet, and with hands raised to him in supplication,—

"Have mercy on me, father!" exclaimed she; "have mercy on me, I beseech you on my knees; tell me what it is that distresses you! I must know why it is that my father buries himself in

this solitude and seems to fly even from his child!"

"Lenora! thou last and only treasure that remainest to me on earth," replied De Vlierbeck, in a broken voice, with despair in his wild gaze,— "Lenora, thou hast suffered dreadfully, my child, hast thou not? Rest thy poor head in my bosom. A terrible blow, my child, is about to fall on us!"

Lenora did not seem to pay any attention to these remarks, but, disengaging herself from her father's embrace, replied, in firm and decided tones,—

"I have not come here, father, for consolation, but with the unalterable determination to learn the cause of your suffering. I will not go away without knowing what misfortune it is that has so long deprived me of your love. No matter how much I may venerate you and respect your silence, the sense of duty is greater even than veneration. I must—I *will*—know the secret of your grief!"

"Thou deprived of thy father's love?" exclaimed De Vlierbeck, reproachfully and with surprise;— "my love for thee, my adored child, is precisely the secret of my grief. For ten years I have drained the bitter cup and prayed the Almighty to make you happy; but, alas! my prayers have always been unheard!"

"Shall I be unhappy, then?" asked Lenora, without betraying the least emotion.

"Unhappy, because of the misery that awaits us," replied her father. "The blow that is about

to fall on our house destroys all that we possess. We must leave Grinselhof."

The last words, which plainly confirmed her fears, seemed for a moment to appall the girl; but she repressed her feelings, and answered him, with increased courage,—

"You are not dying this slow death because ill-fortune has overtaken *you*, my father; I know the unconquerable force of your character too well for that. No! your heart is weak and yielding because *I* have to partake your poverty! Bless you, bless you, for your affection! But, tell me, father, if I were offered all the wealth of the world on condition that I would consent to see you suffer for a single day, what think you I would answer?"

Dumb with surprise, the poor man looked proudly at his daughter, and a gentle pressure of her hand was his sole reply.

"Ah!" continued she, "I would refuse all the treasures of earth and meet poverty without a sigh. And you, father,—if they offered you all the gold of America for your Lenora, what would you do?"

"How can you ask, child?" exclaimed her father; "do we sell our hearts' blood for gold?"

"And so," continued the girl, "our Maker has left us that which is dearest to us both in this world; why then should we mourn when we ought to be grateful for his compassionate care? Take heart once more, dear father; no matter what may be our future lot,—should we even be forced to

take refuge in a hovel,—nothing can harm us as long as we are not separated!"

Smiles, astonishment, admiration, and love, by turns flitted over the wan features of the poor old man, who seemed altogether unnerved and disconcerted by the painful *dénouement.* At length, after some moments of unbroken silence, he clasped his hands, and, gazing intensely into her eyes through his starting tears,—

"Lenora, Lenora! my child!" he exclaimed, "thou art not of earth!—thou art an angel! The unselfish grandeur of thy soul unmans me completely!"

She saw she had conquered. The light of courage was rekindled again in her father's eye, and his lofty brow was lifted once more under the sentiment of dignity and self-devotion that struggled for life in his suffering heart. Lenora looked at him with a heavenly smile, and exclaimed, rapturously,

"Up! up! father; come to my arms; away with grief! United in each other's love, fate itself is powerless in our presence!"

Father and daughter sprang into each other's arms, and for a long while remained speechless, wrapped in a tender embrace; then, seating themselves with their hands interlocked, they were silent and absorbed, as if the world and its misery were altogether forgotten.

"A new life—a new and refreshing current of blood—seems to have been suddenly poured into my veins," said Monsieur De Vlierbeck. "Alas,

Lenora, what a sinner I have been! how wrong I was not to divulge all! But you must pardon me, beloved child; you must pardon me. It was the fear of afflicting you—the hope of finding some means of rescue, of escape—that sealed my lips. I did not know you, my daughter; I did not know the inestimable treasure that God in his mercy had lavished on me! But *now* you shall know all; I will no longer hide the secret of my conduct and my grief. The fatal hour has come; the blow I desired to ward off is about to fall and cannot be turned aside! Are you prepared, dear child, to hear your father's story?"

Lenora, who was delighted to behold the calm and radiant smile that illuminated the face of her heart-broken parent, answered him instantly, in caressing tones,—

"Pour all your woes into my heart, dear father, and conceal nothing. The part I have to perform must be based on complete knowledge of every thing; and you will feel how much your confidence relieves your burdened soul."

"Take, then, your share of suffering, daughter," replied De Vlierbeck, "and help me to bear my cross! I will disguise nothing. What I am about to disclose is indeed lamentable; yet do not tremble and give way at the recital, for, if any thing should move you, it must be the story of a father's torture. You will learn now, my child, why Monsieur Denecker has had the hardihood to behave toward us as he has done."

He dropped her hand, but, without averting his eager gaze from her anxious eyes, continued:—

"You were very young, Lenora, but gentle and loving as at present, and your blessed mother found all her happiness centered in your care and comfort. We dwelt on the lands of our forefathers; nothing disturbed the even tenor of our simple lives; and, by proper economy, our moderate income sufficed to support us in a manner becoming our rank and name.

"I had a younger brother, who was endowed with an excellent heart, but generous to a fault and somewhat imprudent. He lived in town, and married a lady of noble family who was no richer than himself. She was showy in her tastes and habits, and, I fear, induced him to increase his revenue by adventurous means. There can be no doubt that he speculated largely in the public funds. But probably you do not understand what this means, my child. It is a species of *gambling*, by which a man may in a moment gain millions; and yet it is a game that may, with equal rapidity, plunge him into the depths of misery and reduce him as if by magic to the condition of a beggar.

"At first, my brother was remarkably successful, and established himself in town in a style of living that was the envy of our wealthiest citizens. He came to see us frequently, bringing you, who were his godchild, a thousand beautiful presents, and lavished his affection with testimonials of kindness which were proportioned to his fortune. I spoke

to him often about the dangerous character of his adventures, and endeavored to convince him that it was unbecoming a gentleman to risk his property upon the hazards of an hour; but, as continued success emboldened him more and more, the passion for gambling made him deaf to all my appeals, all my advice.

"At last the evil hour came! The luck which had so long favored him became inconstant; he lost a considerable portion of his gains, and saw his fortune diminishing with every venture. Still, courage did not fail him; but, on the contrary, he seemed to fight madly against fate, with the idle hope of forcing fortune to turn once more in his favor. But, alas, it was a fatal delusion!

"One night—I tremble as I recall it—I was in my chamber and nearly ready to retire; you were already in bed, and your mother was saying her prayers on her knees beside your little couch. A tremendous storm raged without: hail beat in torrents against the windows, and the wind howled in the chimneys and swayed the trees as if it was about to blow down the house. The violence of the tempest began to make me somewhat anxious, when suddenly the door-bell was pulled and the sound of horses heard at the gate. In a moment the summons was answered by one of our servants,—for we kept two then,—and a female rushed into the room, throwing herself in tears at my feet. It was my brother's wife!

"Trembling with fright, I of course hastened to

raise her; but she clung to my knees, begging my assistance, imploring me, by every passionate appeal she could think of, to save her husband's life, and convincing me by her sobs and distraction that some frightful calamity was impending over my brother!

"Your mother joined me eagerly in my efforts to calm the sufferer, and by degrees we managed to extract the cause of her singular conduct and unseasonable visit. My brother—alas!—had lost all he possessed, and even more! His wife's story was heart-rending; but its conclusion filled us with more anxiety for her husband than his losses; for, overcome by the certainty of a dishonored name, haunted by the reflection that law and justice would soon overtake him, my poor brother had made an attempt upon his life! The hand of God had providentially guided his wife to the apartment, where she surprised him at the fatal moment and snatched the deadly instrument from his grasp! He was then locked up in a room; dumb, overcome, bowed down to the earth, and guarded by two faithful friends. If any one on earth could save him, it was surely his brother!

"Such was the wild appeal of my wretched sister-in-law, who, heedless of the stormy night, had thrown herself into a coach and fled to me, through the tempest, as her only hope for their salvation. There she was at my feet, bathed in tears, sobbing, screaming, beseeching me to accompany her to town. *Could* I—*did* I—hesitate? Your

tender mother, who saw at once the frightful condition of the family, and sympathized as woman's heart alone can do with human misery, eagerly implored me not to lose a moment. 'Save him, save him!' exclaimed she; 'spare nothing: I will consent to every thing you may think proper to do or sacrifice!'

"We flew back to town through the storm and darkness. You grow pale, Lenora, at the very thought of it, for it was indeed frightful, and you can never know the impression it made on me: these whitened hairs—whitened before their time—are the records of that terrible night! But let me continue.

"It is needless to describe the wild despair in which I found my brother, or to tell you how long I had to wrestle with his spirit in order to force a ray of hope into his soul. There was but one means by which we could save his honor and life; but—oh God!—at what a sacrifice! I was obliged to pledge all my property as security for his debts. Nothing could be spared; our ancestral manor-lands, your mother's marriage-portion, your moderate dowry,—all were ventured with the certainty that the greater part would unquestionably be lost! On these hard conditions my brother's honor might be saved; and, if that could be rescued, he was willing to renounce the determination to escape shame by death. I must in justice say that it was not he who demanded the sacrifice from me: on the contrary, he did not suppose that I could

or would make it; but I was satisfied in my mind that if I did not settle his affairs, at all hazards, he would execute his criminal project against his life. And yet—and yet, my child—*I hesitated!*"

"Father!" exclaimed Lenora, "*you did not refuse!*"

A happy smile beamed on his face as he met the questioning glance of his daughter and answered, firmly,—

"I loved my brother, Lenora; but I loved *you*, my only child, much more. The sacrifice demanded of me by his creditors insured misery for your mother and for you!"

"Oh, God! oh, God!" sobbed Lenora.

"On one side my heart was distracted by this dreadful thought, while on the other I was assailed by the despair that was present in the bankrupt's chamber; but generosity conquered in the awful trial, and at daylight I sought out the principal creditors and signed the documents that saved a brother's life and honor but gave up my wife and child to want."

"Thank God!" gasped Lenora, as if she had been relieved from a horrible nightmare. "Bless you, bless you, father, for your noble, generous conduct!"

She rose from her seat, and, passing her arms around his neck, gave him a glowing kiss with as much solemnity as if she had been anxious to endue this mark of love with all the fervor and sacredness of a benediction.

"Ah! but canst thou bless me, my child," said he, with eyes full of gratitude, "for an act that should implore thy pardon?"

"*My* pardon, father!" exclaimed Lenora, with surprise on all her features. "Oh, had you done otherwise, what would I not have suffered in doubting the goodness of my parent's heart! Now, now, I love you more than ever! *Pardon you*, father? Is it a crime to save a brother's life when it is in your keeping?"

"Alas, Lenora, the world does not reason thus, and never forgives us for the guilt of poverty. Reduced to that, we suffer humiliations which any one may observe in the lives of multitudes of our nobles. Yes; society regards poverty as a crime, and it treats us like outcasts. Our equals avoid us in order not to be confounded in our misery; while peasants and tradesmen laugh at our misfortune as if it was a sort of agreeable revenge. Happy, happy they to whom heaven has given an angel to pour comfort and consolation into their hearts in hours of want and dejection! But listen, my child!

"My brother was saved, and I concealed most carefully the assistance I had been to him; he left the country and went with his wife to America, where, ever since, he has worked hard and gained hardly enough to support a miserable existence. His wife died during the voyage. And, as to ourselves, we no longer possess any thing; for Grinselhof and our other lands were mortgaged for more

than they were worth. Besides this, I was forced to borrow from a gentleman of my acquaintance four thousand *francs* upon my bond.

"When your mother heard of the sacrifices to which I was forced to submit, she made no reproaches; at first she fully approved my conduct. But very soon we became necessarily subjected to privations under which your mother's strength declined, till, without a sigh or complaint, she began to fade away slowly from earth. It was a dreadful situation; for, to conceal our ruin and save our ancestral name from contempt, we were forced to part with the last ounce of our silver to pay the interest on our debts. Gradually our horses and servants disappeared; the paths that led to our neighbors soon became grass-grown; and we declined all social invitations, so as to avoid the necessity of returning the compliment. A rumor about us began to spread through the village and among the noble families that had formerly been on terms of intimacy with us; and scandal declared that *avarice* had driven us to a life of meanness and isolation! We joyously accepted the imputation, and even the coldness with which our holiday friends accompanied it; it was a veil with which society thought proper to cover us, and beneath its folds our poverty was safe from scrutiny.

"But I am approaching scenes, my child, the recollection of which almost unnerves me. My story has reached the most painful moment of my life, and I beseech you to hear me calmly.

"Your poor mother wasted away to a skeleton; her sunken eyes were hardly visible in their deep sockets; a livid pallor suffused her cheeks. As I saw her fading,—fading,—the wife whom I had loved more than life,—as I gazed on those death-struck features and saw the fatal evidences each day clearer and clearer,—I became nearly mad with despair and grief."

Lenora shuddered with emotion as her breast heaved convulsively under the sobs she strove to repress. Her father stopped a moment, almost overcome by the recital; but, rallying his courage quickly, he forced himself to go on with his sad recollections:—

"Poor mother! she did nothing but weep! Every time she looked at her child—her dear little Lenora—tears filled her eyes. Thy name was always on her lips, as if she were forever addressing a prayer for thee to God in heaven! At last the dreadful hour arrived when she heard the Almighty's voice summoning her above. The clergyman performed the services for the dying; and you, my child, had been taken from her arms and sent out of the house. It was midnight, and I was alone with her whose icy lips had already imprinted on mine their last sad kiss. My heart bled. Oh, God! how wretched — how wretched —were those parting hours! My beloved wife lay there before me as if already a corpse, while the tears yet trickled down her hollow cheeks and she strove to utter your name with her expiring breath.

Kneeling beside her, I implored God's mercy for her passing hour, and kissed away the sweat of agony that stood upon her brow. Suddenly I thought I perceived an effort to speak, and, bending my ear to her lips, she called me by name, and said, 'It is over, my love, it is over; farewell! It has not pleased the Almighty to assuage my dying hour, and I go with the conviction that my child will suffer want and wretchedness on earth!'

"I know not what my love inspired me to say in that solemn moment; but I called God to witness that you *should* escape suffering, and that your life should be happy! A heavenly smile illuminated her eyes, and she believed my promise. With an effort, she lifted her thin hands once more round my neck and drew my lips to hers. But soon those wasted arms fell heavily on the bed;—my Margaret was gone;—thy mother was no more!"

De Vlierbeck's head fell on his breast. Lenora's bosom heaved convulsively as she took his hand without uttering a word; and, for a long time, nothing was heard in that sad confessional but the sobs of the maiden and the sighs of her heart-broken father.

"What I have yet to say," continued the poor gentleman, "is not so painful as what I have already told you: it concerns only myself. Perhaps it would be better if I said nothing about it; but I need a friend who possesses all my confi-

dence and can sympathize with me thoroughly in all I have undergone for the last ten years.

"Listen, then, Lenora. Your mother was no more; she was gone;—she who was my last staff in life! I remained at Grinselhof alone with you, my child, and with my promise,—a promise made to God and to the dead! What should I do to fulfil it? Quit my hereditary estate? wander away seeking my fortune in foreign lands, and work for our mutual support? That would not do, for it would have devoted you at once to the chances of a wretched uncertainty. I could not think of such a course with any degree of satisfaction; nor was it till after long and anxious reflection that a ray of hope seemed to promise us both a happy future.

"I resolved to disguise our poverty more carefully than ever, and to devote my time to the most elaborate cultivation of your mind. God made you beautiful in face and person, Lenora; but your father was anxious to initiate you into the mysteries of science and art, and, while he endowed you with a knowledge of the world, to make you virtuous, pious, and modest. I desired to make you an accomplished woman, and I hoped that the nobility of your blood, the charms of your beauty, the treasures of your heart and intellect, would compensate in society for the portion that was denied you. Thus was it, my child, that I thought in time, you would make a suitable alliance which would restore you to the position you

hold by birth. For ten years, Lenora, this has been my occupation and my hope. What I had forgotten or never learned, I studied at night to teach you next morning; I labored hard that I might not only instruct you wisely but that you might acquire easily; and, at the same time, I strove by every honest means to conceal from you every thing that could give a hint or cause a suspicion by which your life might be shadowed. Oh, Lenora,—shall I confess it?—I have suffered hunger and undergone the most cruel privations; I have passed half my nights mending my clothes, working in the garden, studying and practising in the dark, so as to hide our poverty from you and the world. But all that was nothing; in the silence of night I was not forced to blush before any one. By day I had to encounter all kinds of insults, and, with a bleeding heart, swallow affront and humiliation."

Lenora looked at her father with eyes moistened by compassion. De Vlierbeck pressed her hand, and continued:—

"Be not sad, Lenora; if the Lord's hand inflicted deep wounds with every blow, he bestowed a balm which cured them. One little smile of thy gentle face was sufficient to make me pour forth an ejaculation to Heaven: you, you at least were happy, and in your happiness I saw the fulfilment of my promise!

"At length I thought that God himself had thrown in our path one who would save you from

threatening danger. A mutual inclination arose between Gustave and you, and a marriage seemed the natural consequence. Under these circumstances I apprized Monsieur Denecker, during his last visit, of the deplorable condition of my affairs; but no sooner did I make the disclosure than he peremptorily refused his consent to the union. As if this terrible blow, which withered all my hopes, had not been sufficient to overwhelm me, I learned, almost at the same time, that the friend who loaned me four thousand francs, with the right to renew my obligation to him every year, had died in Germany, and that his heirs demanded the payment of the debt! I ran all over town, rapped at every friendly door, ransacked heaven and earth in my despair, to escape this last ignominy; but all my efforts were fruitless. To-morrow, perhaps, a placard will be stuck on the door of Grinselhof, announcing the sale not only of our estate but also of our furniture and of every trifling object that memory and association have rendered dear to us. Honor requires that we shall surrender, to public sale, every thing of the least value to pay our debts. If fate were kind enough to allow us to satisfy every creditor it would be a great consolation, my child, in our misery. Does not this fatal history break your heart?"

"Is that all which makes you despond, father? Have you no other grief? Does your heart conceal no other secret from me?" asked Lenora.

"None, my child. You know every thing."

"I can very well understand," replied Lenora, gravely, "that others would consider a blow like this as a frightful misfortune; but how can it affect us? You even appear calm. Why, father, do you, like me, appear indifferent to the inexorable decree of fate?"

"Because you have inspired me with courage and confidence, Lenora; because your love is restored to me fully after a long constraint; because you let me hope that you will not be unhappy. I know what you want to say, noble child, whom God has given me as a shield against every ill! Well, I will encounter ruin without bowing my head, and submit with resignation to the hand of God! Alas!" continued he, sadly, "who can tell what sufferings are yet in store for us? We may be forced to wander about the world,—to seek an asylum far from those we know and love,—to earn our daily bread by the labor of our hands! Oh, Lenora, you know not how bitter is the bread of misery,—of poverty!"

The maiden shuddered as she saw the cloud falling once more like a curtain over her father's face. She grasped his hand tenderly, and, fixing her gaze intently on his, said, in beseeching tones,—

"Oh, father! let not the happy smile that just now lighted your features depart from them again! Believe me, we shall still be happy. Fancy yourself in the position that awaits us: and what do you see in it so frightful? I have skill to

do all that woman can do; and then your instructions have made me able to instruct others in the arts and sciences you have taught me. I shall be strong and active enough for both of us, and God will bless my labor. Behold us, father, peacefully at home, with tranquil hearts and always together in our neat apartment: we will love one another, set misfortune at defiance, and live together in the heaven that our common sacrifice has made! Oh, it seems to me, father, that the true happiness of our lives is only beginning! How can you still give yourself up to despair when pleasure is in store for us,—a pleasure such as few upon earth are permitted to enjoy?"

Monsieur De Vlierbeck looked at his daughter with rapture. Those enthusiastic but gentle tones had so touched his heart, that noble courage had inspired him with so much admiration, that tears of joy filled his eyes. With one hand he drew Lenora to his bosom, and, placing the other on her forehead, he looked to heaven with religious fervor. A silent prayer, a blessing on his child, an outpouring of thankfulness, arose from his heart, like the sacred flame from an altar, toward the throne of Him who had bestowed that angelic child!

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW days afterward, as De Vlierbeck had predicted, the public sale of all their property was inserted in the papers and placarded over the city and neighborhood. The affair made some noise, and every one was astonished at the ruin of a person whom they considered rich and miserly.

As the sale was stated to be in consequence of his departure from the country, the gossips would have been unable to discover the genuine motive if the news had not come from Antwerp that De Vlierbeck had resolved to pay his debts and was wretchedly poor. The cause of his misfortune—that is to say, his liability for his brother—was known, though all the circumstances were not fully understood.

As soon as the publication was made, the poor old gentleman led, if possible, a more retired life than ever, in order to avoid explanations. Resigned to his fate, he quietly awaited the day of sale; and, although his feelings often strove to master his resolution, the constant care and encouragement of his noble-hearted daughter enabled him to encounter the fatal hour with a degree of pride.

In the mean while he received a letter from

Gustave at Rome, containing a few lines for his child. The young man declared that absence from Lenora had only increased his affection, and that his only consolation was the hope of future union with her by the bonds of marriage. But in other respects the letter was not encouraging. He said with pain that all his efforts to change his uncle's determination had, up to that time, been fruitless. De Vlierbeck did not conceal from Lenora that he no longer had a hope of her union with Gustave, and that she ought to strive against this unhappy love in order to escape from greater disappointment. Indeed, since her father's poverty had become publicly known, Lenora was convinced that duty commanded her to renounce every hope; yet she could not help feeling pleased and strengthened by the thought that Gustave still loved her, and that he, whose memory filled her heart, dreamed of her in his distant home and mourned her absence.

She kept her promises to him faithfully. How often did she pronounce his name in the solitude of that garden! How often did she sigh beneath the catalpa, as if anxious to trust the winds with a message of love to other lands! In her lonely walks she repeated his tender words; and often did she stop musingly at some well-remembered spot where he had blessed her with a tender word or look.

But poor De Vlierbeck was obliged to undergo additional pain; for, as if every misfortune that

could assail him was to be accumulated at that moment on his devoted head, he received from America the news of his brother's death! The unfortunate wanderer died of exhaustion in the wilderness near Hudson's Bay. The poor gentleman wept long and bitterly for the loss of a brother whom he tenderly loved; but he was soon and roughly turned aside to encounter the catastrophe of his own fate.

The day of sale arrived. Early in the morning Grinselhof was invaded by all sorts of people, who, moved by curiosity or a desire to purchase, overran every nook and corner of the house, examining the furniture and estimating its value.

De Vlierbeck had caused every thing that was to be sold to be carried into the most spacious apartments, where, aided by his daughter, he passed the entire preceding night in dusting, cleaning, and polishing the various articles, so that they might prove more attractive to competitors. He had no personal interest in this labor; for, his funded property having been sold some days before at great loss, it was certain that the sale of all his remaining possessions would not exceed the amount of his debts. It was a noble sentiment of honor and probity that compelled him to sacrifice his rest for his creditors, so as to diminish as much as he could the amount of their losses. It was clear that De Vlierbeck did not intend to prolong his stay at Grinselhof after the sale; for among the articles to be offered

were the only two bedsteads in the house, with their bedding, and a large quantity of clothes belonging to him and his daughter.

Very early in the day Lenora went to the farmhouse, where she remained until all was over. At ten o'clock the saloon was full of people. Nobles and gentlefolks of both sexes were mixed up with brokers and second-hand dealers who had come to Grinselhof with the hope of getting bargains. Peasants might be seen talking together, in low voices, with surprise at De Vlierbeck's ruin; and there were even some who laughed openly and joked as the auctioneer read the terms of sale!

As the salesman put up a very handsome wardrobe, De Vlierbeck himself entered the apartment and mingled with the bidders. His appearance caused a general movement in the crowd; heads went together and men began to whisper, while the bankrupt was stared at with insolent curiosity or with pity, but by the greater part with indifference or derision. Yet, whatever malicious feeling existed in the assembly, it did not last long; for the firm demeanor and imposing countenance of De Vlierbeck was never on any occasion more instinct with that dignity which inspires respect. He was poor; fortune had struck him a cruel blow; but in his manly look and calm features there beamed a brave and independent soul which misfortune itself had been unable to crush.

The auctioneer went on with the sale, assisted in his description of the various articles by Monsieur De Vlierbeck, who informed the bidders of their origin, antiquity, and value. Occasionally some gentleman of the neighborhood, who, in better days, had been on good terms with Lenora's father, approached him with words of sympathy; but he always managed to escape adroitly from these indiscreet attempts at consolation. Whenever it was necessary for him to speak, he showed so much self-command and composure that he was far above the idle *compassion* of that careless crowd; yet if his countenance was calm and dignified, his heart was weighed down by absorbing grief. All that had belonged to his ancestors—articles that were emblazoned with the arms of his family and had been religiously preserved as heirlooms for several centuries—were sold at contemptible rates and passed into the hands of brokers. As each historical relic was placed on the table or held up by the auctioneer, the links of his illustrious race seemed to break off and depart. When the sale was nearly over, the *portraits* of the eminent men who had borne the name of De Vlierbeck were taken down from the walls and placed upon the stand. The first—that of the hero of St. Quentin—was knocked off to a dealer for little more than three francs! In the sale of this portrait, and the laughable price it brought, there was so much bitter irony that, for the first time, the agony that

had been so long torturing De Vlierbeck's heart began to exhibit its traces in his countenance. No sooner had the hammer fallen, than, with downcast eyes and a sigh that was inaudible even to his nearest neighbor, the stricken nobleman turned from the crowd and left the saloon, so as not to witness the final sacrifice of the remaining memorials that bound him to his race.

The sun was but an hour or two above the horizon. A deathlike silence had taken the place of the noise, bustle, and vulgarity that ruled at Grinselhof during the morning; the solitary garden-walks were deserted, the house-door and gate were closed, and a stranger might have supposed that nothing had occurred to disturb the usual quiet of the spot. Suddenly the door of the dwelling opened, and two persons appeared upon the sill; one, a man advanced in life, the other, a pale and serious woman. Each carried a small package and seemed ready for travel. Lenora was dressed in a simple dark gown and bonnet, her neck covered by a small square handkerchief. De Vlierbeck was buttoned up to the chin in a coarse black greatcoat, and wore a threadbare cap whose large visor nearly masked his features. Although it was evident that the homeless travellers had literally stripped themselves of all superfluities and had determined to go forth with the merest necessaries of decency, there was something in the manner in which they

wore their humble costumes that distinctly marked their birth and breeding. The old man's features were not changed; but it was difficult to say whether they expressed pleasure, pain, or indifference. Lenora seemed strong and resolute, although she was about to quit the place of her birth and separate herself, perhaps forever, from all she had loved from infancy,—from those aged groves beneath whose shadows the dawn of love first broke upon her heart,—from that remembered tree at whose feet the timid avowal of Gustave's passion had fallen on her ear. But a sense of duty possessed and ruled her heart. Reason in her was not overmastered by sensibility; and, when she saw her father tottering at her side, all her energy was rallied in the effort to sustain him.

They did not linger at the door, but, crossing the garden rapidly, directed their steps toward the farm-house, which they entered to bid its occupants farewell. Bess and her servant-maid were in the first apartment below.

"Mother Bess," said Monsieur De Vlierbeck, calmly, "we have come to bid you good-by."

Bess stared a moment anxiously at the travellers, and, lifting her apron to her eyes, left the apartment; while the servant-maid leaned her head against the window-frame and began to sob as if her heart would break. In a short time Bess returned with her husband, whom she had found in the barn.

"Alas! is it true, sir," said the farmer, in a stifled voice,—"is it true that you are going to leave Grinselhof, and that, perhaps, we shall never see you again?"

"Come, come, mother Bess," said the poor bankrupt, as he took and pressed her hand; "don't weep on that account; you see we bear our lot with resignation.

Bess raised her head, threw her eyes once more over the humble dress of her old master, and began to cry so violently that she could not utter a word. Her husband strove manfully to repress his emotion; and, after an effort or two, addressed Monsieur De Vlierbeck in a manly way:—

"May I ask the favor of you, sir, to let me say a word or two to you in private?"

De Vlierbeck entered the adjoining room, where he was followed by the farmer, who shut the door carefully.

"I hardly dare, sir," said he, "to mention my request; but will you pardon me if it displeases you?"

"Speak out frankly, my friend," returned De Vlierbeck, with a smile.

"Look you, sir," stammered the tender-hearted laborer. "Every thing that I have earned I owe to you. I had nothing when I married Bess; and yet, with your kindness, we have managed to succeed. God's mercy and your favor have made us prosperous; while you, our benefactors, have become unfortunate and are forced to wander away from their home,—God knows where! You may

be forced to suffer privations and want; but that must not be: I would reproach myself as long as I live. Oh, sir!" continued he, as his voice faltered and his eyes filled with tears, "all that I have on earth is at your service!"

De Vlierbeck pressed the hard hand of the rustic with a trembling grasp, as he replied,—

"You are a worthy man indeed, and I am happy that it was once in my power to protect and serve you; but I cannot accept your offer, my friend: keep what you have earned by the sweat of your brow, and do not concern yourself for our future fate, for, with God's help, we shall find means to live."

"Oh, sir," said the farmer, beseechingly, and clasping his hands in an attitude of entreaty, "do not reject the trifle I offer you;"—he opened a drawer and pointed to a small heap of silver.—"See!" said he; "that is not the hundredth part of the good you have done us. Grant me this favor, I beseech you: take this money, sir; and if it spare you a single suffering or trial I shall thank God for it on my knees!"

Tears streamed down the wan and wrinkled cheeks of the poor gentleman as he replied,—

"Thanks! thanks! my friend; but I must refuse it. All persuasion is useless. Let us leave this room!"

"But, sir," cried the farmer, in astonishment, "where do you intend to go? Tell me, for God's sake!"

"I cannot," replied Monsieur De Vlierbeck; "for I don't know myself; and, even if I did, prudence would make me silent."

Uttering these words, he returned to the other room, where he found everybody in tears. He saw at once that for his own sake as well as his daughter's he must end these trying scenes; and accordingly, in a firm voice, he told her it was time to be gone. There were a few more tender and eager pressures of hands, a few more farewells, a few last looks at the old homestead and its surroundings, and the bankrupt pair sallied forth with their bundles, and, passing the bridge just at sunset, departed on foot across the desolate moor.

It is hard to bid farewell and quit the spots with which, even in a summer's journey, we have formed agreeable associations; but harder far it is to bid adieu forever to the home of our ancestors and the haunts of our youth. This dreadful trial was passing in De Vlierbeck's heart. From a distant point on the road where the domain of Grinselhof was masked by thickets, the wanderer turned his eyes once more in the direction of the old *château.* Big tears stood in his eyes and slowly rolled down his hollow cheeks as he stood there, silent and motionless, with clasped hands, gazing into vacancy. But night was rapidly falling around the wayfarers; and, recalling him to consciousness with a kiss, Lenora gently drew her father from the spot till they disappeared in the windings of the wood.

CHAPTER IX.

Monsieur De Vlierbeck had not been gone a week, when a letter addressed to him from Italy reached the village post-office. The carrier inquired of Farmer John where the old proprietor of Grinselhof had fixed his residence; but neither from him, the notary, nor any one else in the neighborhood, could he discover the bankrupt's retreat. The same fate awaited three or four other letters which followed the first from Italy; and, indeed, nobody bothered himself any more about the wanderers except the peasant, who every market-day pestered the country-folks from every quarter with questions about his old master. But no one had seen or heard of him.

Four months passed slowly by, when one morning a handsome post-chaise stopped at the door of our old acquaintance the notary and dropped a young gentleman in travelling-costume.

"Where's your master?" said he impatiently to the servant, who excused the notary under the plea of his present engagement with other visitors, but invited the stranger to await his leisure in the parlor.

The youth was evidently disconcerted by the

delay; for he paced the apartment with rapid strides and seemed altogether absorbed by some anxiety or disappointment which made him extremely restless. The notary's visitors seemed to be either very tedious clients or engaged in very important business; for more than half an hour elapsed before that functionary made his appearance. He came into the room ceremoniously, prepared to measure his words and reception by his visitor's rank; but no sooner did he perceive who it was than his calculating features relaxed into a professional smile, and he advanced rapidly toward Gustave with outstretched hands.

"How are you, how are you, my dear sir?" said he. "I have been expecting you for several days, and I am really happy to see you at last. I am greatly flattered by the confidence you are disposed to place in me, and am ready, whenever you please, to devote myself to your affairs. By-the-way, I suppose there is a will?"

A shadow passed over Gustave's brow and his face became serious as he took a portfolio from his overcoat and drew forth a package of papers.

"I am pained, sir, at your loss," said the notary. "Your excellent uncle was my friend, and I deplore his death more than that of any one else. It pleased God that he should die far away from his home. But such, alas! is man's fate. We must console ourselves by the reflection that we are all mortal. Your uncle was *very* fond of you,

and I suppose you have not been forgotten in his last moments?"

"You may see for yourself," said Gustave, as he placed the package on the table.

The notary ran his eyes over the papers, and, as he perused them, his face exhibited by turns surprise and satisfaction.

"Permit me," said he, "to congratulate you, Monsieur Gustave; these documents are all in order and unassailable. Heir of all his fortune! Do you know, sir, that you are more than a *millionaire?*"

"We will speak of that another time," said Gustave, interrupting him rather sharply. "I called on you to-day to ask a favor."

"You have but to name it, sir."

"You were the notary of Monsieur De Vlierbeck?"

"I was."

"I heard from my uncle that Monsieur De Vlierbeck had become very poor. I have reasons for desiring that his misfortunes may not be prolonged."

"Sir," said the notary, "I presume that you intend to do him an act of kindness; and, in truth, it could not be bestowed on a worthier man, for I know the cause of his ruin and sufferings. He was a victim of generosity and honor. He may have carried these virtues to imprudence and even to madness; but he deserved a better fate."

"And now, sir," said Gustave, "I want you to

let me know, with the least amount of details possible, what I can do to assist De Vlierbeck without wounding his pride. I know the condition of his affairs; for my uncle told me all about them. Among other debts there was a bond for four thousand francs, which belongs to the heirs of Hoogebaen: I want that bond *immediately*, even if I have to pay four times as much as it is worth."

The notary stared at Gustave without replying.

"You seem disconcerted by my demand," said Gustave, somewhat anxiously.

"Not exactly," returned the notary; "but I do not altogether understand your emotion, although I fear the news I must impart will affect you painfully. If my anticipations are correct I have cause to be sorry for you, sir!"

"Explain yourself," cried Gustave, alarmed; "explain yourself, sir! Has death been at Grinselhof? Is my last hope destroyed?"

"No, no," replied the notary, quickly; "don't tremble so; they both live, but they have been stricken by a great misfortune."

"Well? well?" exclaimed Gustave, with questioning eagerness, rising from his chair.

"Be calm, be calm, sir," said the notary, soothingly; "sit down and listen; it is not so terrible as you may perhaps think, since fortune enables you to soften their misery."

"Oh, God be thanked!" cried Gustave. "But let me beg you to hasten your disclosures, for your slowness racks me!"

"Know, then," continued the notary, "that during your absence the bond in question fell due. For many months De Vlierbeck made unavailing efforts to find money to honor it at maturity; but all his property was mortgaged, and no one would assist him. In order to escape the mortification of a forced sale, De Vlierbeck offered every thing at public auction, even down to his furniture and clothes! The sale produced about enough to pay his debts, and everybody was satisfied by the honorable conduct of De Vlierbeck, who plunged himself into absolute beggary to save his name."

"And so he lives in the *château* of his family only as a tenant?"

"No; he has left it."

"And where does he reside, then? I want to see him instantly."

"I do not know."

"How?—you do not know?"

"Nobody knows where he dwells: he left the province without informing any one of his designs."

"Alas!" cried Gustave, with profound emotion, "and is it so? Shall I be forced to live longer without them?—without knowing what has become of them? Can you give me no hint or clue to their residence? Does nobody, nobody know where they are?"

"Nobody," replied the notary. "The evening after their sale De Vlierbeck left Grinselhof on foot and crossed the moor by some unknown

road: I made efforts to discover his retreat, but always without success."

As this sad news was imparted to Gustave he grew deadly pale, trembled violently, and covered his forehead with his clasped hands, as if striving to conceal the big tears that ran from his eyes. What the notary first told him of De Vlierbeck's misfortunes had wounded his sensibility, though he was less struck by that recital, because he had already become partially aware of the poor gentleman's embarrassment; but the certainty that he could not *immediately* discover his beloved Lenora and snatch her from want overwhelmed him with the bitterest anguish.

The notary fixed his eyes on the young man, shrugged his shoulders, and regarded him with an expression of pity.

"You are young, sir," said he, "and, like most men at your time of life, exaggerate both pain and pleasure. Your despair is unfounded; for it is easy in our time to discover people whom we want to find. With a little money and diligence we may be sure, in a few days, to discover Monsieur De Vlierbeck's retreat, even if he has gone abroad to a foreign country. If you are willing to charge me with the pursuit I will spare neither time nor trouble to bring you satisfactory news."

Gustave stared hopefully at the notary as he grasped his hand and replied, with a smile of gratitude,—

"Oh, render me that inestimable service, sir! Spare no money; ransack heaven and earth if it is necessary; but, in God's name, let me know, and let me know *soon*, where De Vlierbeck and his daughter are hidden. It is impossible for me to describe the sufferings of my heart or the ardor of my desire to find them. Let me assure you that the first good news you bring will be more grateful to my soul than if you had restored me to life."

"Fear nothing, sir," answered the notary. "My clerks shall write letters of inquiry this very night in every direction. To-morrow morning early I will be off to Brussels and secure assistance from the public offices. If you authorize me to spare no expense the secret will disclose itself."

"And I," said Gustave,—"I will put the numerous correspondents of our house under contribution, and nothing shall be omitted to detect their refuge, even if I have to travel over Europe."

"Be of good cheer, then, Monsieur Gustave," said the notary; "for I doubt not we shall soon attain our end. And, now that you are assured of my best services, I will be gratified if you allow me to speak to you a moment quietly and seriously. I have no right to ask what are your intentions, and still less the right to suppose that those intentions can be any thing else than proper in every respect. May I inquire if it is your design to marry Mademoiselle Lenora?"

"That is my irrevocable determination," replied the young man.

"Irrevocable?" said the notary. "Be it so! The confidence which your venerable uncle was always pleased to repose in me, and my position as notary of the family, impose on me the duty of setting before you coolly what you are about to do. You are a *millionaire;* you have a name which in commerce alone represents an immense capital. Monsieur De Vlierbeck is penniless; his ruin is generally known; and the world, justly or unjustly, looks askance at a ruined man. With your fortune, with your youth and person, you may obtain the hand of an heiress and double your income!"

Gustave listened to the first words of this calculating essay with evident impatience; but he soon turned away his eyes and began to fold up the papers and put them in his portfolio. As the notary finished, he answered, quickly,—

"Well, well, I suppose you have done your duty, and I thank you; but we have had enough of that. Tell me who owns Grinselhof now?"

The man of business appeared considerably disconcerted by the contemptuous interruption of his visitor; yet he strove to conceal his mortification by a sorry smile, as he replied,—

"I see, sir, that you have taken a firm stand and will do as you please. Grinselhof was bought in by the mortgagees, for the price offered was below its value."

"Who lives there?

"It is uninhabited. No one goes to the country in winter."

"Can it be bought from its present proprietor?"

"Certainly. I am authorized to offer it to any one for the amount of the mortgages."

"Then Grinselhof belongs to *me!* Be kind enough to inform the owners of it at once!"

"Very well, sir. Consider Grinselhof as your property from this moment. If you wish to visit it you will find the keys at the tenant's house."

Gustave took his hat and made ready to go, and, as he did so, pressed the notary's hand with evident cordiality:—

"I am tired and need repose, for I feel somewhat overcome by the sad news you have given me. May God help you in your efforts to fulfil your promises! My gratitude will surpass all you can imagine. Farewell till to-morrow!"

CHAPTER X.

Spring, gentle spring, had thrown aside the funeral garb of winter, and earth awoke again to vigorous life. Grinselhof reappeared in all the splendor of its wild, natural scenery; its

majestic oaks displayed their verdant domes, its roses bloomed as sweetly as of old, elder-blossoms filled the air with delicious odor, butterflies fluttered through the garden, and every thicket was vocal with the song of birds.

Nothing seemed changed at Grinselhof: its roads, its paths, were still deserted, and sad was the silence that reigned in its shadows. Yet immediately around the house there was more life and movement than formerly. At the coach-house two grooms were busy washing and polishing a new and fashionable coach; while the neigh of horses resounded from the stable. A trim waiting-maid stood on the door-sill laughing and joking with the lackeys, and a respectable old butler looked knowingly on the group.

Suddenly the clear silvery ring of a bell was heard from the parlor, and the waiting-maid ran in, exclaiming, "Good Heavens! there's Monsieur ringing for his breakfast, and it is not ready yet!"

A few moments afterward she was seen mounting the staircase with a rich silver salver covered with breakfast-things; and, entering the parlor, she placed them silently on a table before a young gentleman who seemed entirely absorbed by his own thoughts, and then instantly left the room without a word.

The young man began his meal with a careless, indifferent air, as if he either had no appetite or did not know what he was about. The furniture

of the apartment in which he sat presented odd and striking contrasts to an observer. While some of the articles were remarkable for the richness and elegance of their modern style, there were chairs, tables, and cabinets whose sombre hue and elaborate carving denoted an antiquity of several centuries. On the walls were numerous pictures, dimmed by smoke and time, encased in frames that had lost half their ornaments and gilding. These were portraits of warriors, statesmen, priests, and prelates. In the dim corners of the canvas armorial bearings of the house of De Vlierbeck might be seen, and many of the articles of furniture were embellished with the same blazonry.

We were told a while ago that a public sale at Grinselhof had dispersed among a crowd of competitors every thing that belonged to Monsieur De Vlierbeck. How has it come to pass that these portraits have returned to their old nails on walls which they seemed to have abandoned forever?

The listless youth rose from the table, walked slowly about the room, stopped, looked mournfully at the portraits, recommenced his walk, and approached an antique casket placed on a bracket in the corner. He opened it with apparent indifference and took out some simple jewelry,—a pair of ear-rings and a coral necklace. He gazed long at these objects as he held them in his hand; a few tears fell on them, a deep sigh

escaped from his bosom, and he then replaced the jewels in their casket.

Quitting the room, he descended to the court. Waiters and servant-maids saluted as he passed: he acknowledged their civility by a silent nod and went forth to the most secluded parts of the garden. Stopping at the foot of a wild chestnut-tree, he threw himself on the ground, where he sat long in moody reverie until aroused by the ringing voice of Bess, who approached him with a book in her hand:—

"Here, sir, is a book which Mademoiselle Lenora used to read. My goodman went yesterday to market, where he found the farmer who bought it at the sale. After market was over John accompanied the peasant home, and would not leave him till he had bought the book back again. I suppose it is an excellent book, as Mademoiselle used to love it so; and neither gold nor silver could ever get it from me if it wasn't for you, sir. Husband says it is called 'LUCIFER'!"

While she was running on, Gustave seized the book eagerly and ran over its pages without paying attention to what she said. "Thank you, thank you for your kind attention, mother Bess!" said he. "You can't think how happy I am whenever I find any thing that belonged to your mistress. Be assured that I will never forget your goodness." After offering this expression of his thanks to the farmer's wife he opened the book

again and began to read without heeding her further. But the good woman did not go away, and soon interrupted him with a question:—

"May I ask, sir, if you have any news yet of our young lady?"

Gustave shook his head. "Not the least scrap of news, mother Bess. My search has been fruitless."

"That is unlucky, sir. God knows where she may be and what she is suffering. She told me before she went away that she meant to work for her father; but one must have learned to work very early in life to earn a living by one's hands. My heart almost breaks when I think of it. Perhaps that good, sweet young lady is reduced to work for other people and labors like a slave to get a mouthful of bread! I have been a servant, sir, and I know what it is to work from morning until night for others. And she,—she who is so beautiful, so clever, so kind! Oh, sir, it is terrible! I can't help crying like a child, thinking of her miserable life!"

Gustave was overcome by the simple eloquence of the poor woman, and remained silent.

"And then to think," continued Bess, "she might now be so happy! that she might again become mistress of Grinselhof, where she was born and grew up! that her father might pass his old days in quietness, and that they are now wandering about the world poor, sick, abandoned outcasts! Oh, sir, it is sad to know that our benefactors are un-

happy, and to be able to do nothing for them but pray to God and hope for his mercy!"

The simple-minded woman, without meaning it, had touched some tender strings in Gustave's heart; and, as she saw the silent tears coursing their way down his cheeks, she said, entreatingly,—

"Oh, pardon me, sir, for having grieved you so by my talk! but my heart is full, and my feelings force their way without knowing it. If I have done wrong, I am sure you are too kind to be angry with me for loving our young lady so much and bemoaning her misfortune. Have you no orders for me to-day, sir?"

She was about to go, as Gustave raised his downcast eyes and, restraining his tears, exclaimed,—

"I—angry with you, mother Bess?—and angry, too, because you show affection for our poor Lenora? Oh, no, no! On the contrary, I bless you for it with all my heart! The tears you betrayed from my heart have done me good; for I am very unhappy. Life is a burden; and if God, in his mercy, would take me away from earth, I would gladly die. All hope of seeing her again in this world is gone. Perhaps she is awaiting me in the next!"

"Oh, sir! sir! how you talk!" cried the peasant-woman, in alarm. "No! no! that cannot be!"

"You grieve, my good woman, and shed tears for her," continued Gustave, without heeding the interruption; "but don't you see how *my* soul must be consumed with despair? Alas! for

months and months I have implored God for the happiness of seeing her once more! I overcame all obstacles to our marriage, and I became almost mad with joy and impatience as I flew like lightning to the home where I left her; and then my only recompense, my only consolation, was to find her *gone* and the house of her fathers a wilderness!—to know, alas! that she is poor, and, perhaps, languishing in want!—to know that my noble-hearted and beloved Lenora sinks under the weight of misfortune, and yet to be able to do nothing to relieve her!—to be condemned to count in powerless despair her days of affliction, and not even to be sure that suffering has not killed her!"

A profound silence followed this complaining outburst, and the peasant-woman, with her head bent to the earth, sympathized with him truly, till, after a few moments, she attempted to console the sufferer in her simple way:—

"Oh, sir, I understand only too well how much you endure! And yet why despair? Who knows but we may receive some news of our dear young lady when we least expect it? God is good; he will hear our prayers; and our joy for her return will make us forget all our grief!"

"Oh that your prophecy might be realized, my good woman! But seven months have already gone since they departed. During three of them a hundred persons have been employed in seeking the wanderers. They have been sought for in

every direction, and not the slightest intelligence has been obtained; not a trace, not the least sign that they are even alive! My reason tells me not to despair; but my heart magnifies my ills and cries aloud that I have lost her!—lost her forever!"

He was about quitting the garden, when a noise attracted his attention as he pointed toward the road leading to the *château.*

"Listen! Don't you hear something?" cried he.

"It is the gallop of a horse," answered Bess, without comprehending why the noise so much startled her master.

"Poor fool!" said the young man to himself; "why am I so startled by the passing of a horseman?"

"But see! see! he is coming into the avenue!" cried Bess, with increasing interest. "Oh, God! I am sure it is a messenger with news! Heaven grant it may be good!"

As she said this the rider passed through the gate at full gallop, and, drawing rein at the door they had just reached, took a letter from his pocket and handed it to the master of Grinselhof:—

"I come," said he, "from your notary, who ordered me to deliver you this letter without a moment's delay."

Gustave broke the seal with a trembling hand, while Bess, smiling with hope, followed all her master's movements with staring eyes.

As he read the first lines the anxious youth grew pale; but as he went on a tremor ran

through all his limbs, till with a hysterical laugh and clasped hands he exclaimed,—

"Thanks! thanks! Oh, God! she is restored to me!"

"Oh, sir, sir," cried Bess, "is it good news?"

"Yes! yes! rejoice with me! Lenora lives! I know where she is!" answered Gustave, half mad with delight, running into the house and calling all the servants. "Quick! quick! Have out the travelling-carriage and the English horses! My trunk! my cloak! Quick! fly!"

He carried forth with his own hands a number of things that were necessary for the journey. His fleetest horses were attached to the vehicle; and, although they strained their bits and pawed the ground as if impatient for the road, the postillion lashed them fiercely as they dashed through the gateway.

In a moment, and almost as if by magic, the coach was on the road to Antwerp and hidden from the staring crowd by a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER XI.

Suppose that we too take a trip in fancy to Nancy, in France, in search of poor De Vlierbeck and his daughter. Let us wind through an im-

mense number of narrow streets in the quarter known as the Old Town and at last halt at the door of an humble cobbler. This is the place. Pass through the shop, mount the staircase; another story yet; open that door, and here we are.

Every thing indicates poverty; but order and neatness preside over the room. The curtains of the little bed are white as snow, the stove is polished with black-lead till it shines, and the floor is sanded in Flemish style. Mignonette and violets bloom in a box on the window-sill, and a bird chirps in its cage above them. A young woman sits in front of the window; but she is so intent on the linen she is sewing that no other sound is heard in the silent room but that made by the motion of her hands as they guide the needle. She is dressed in the plainest garments; yet they are cut and put on so gracefully that one may declare at a glance she is a lady.

Poor Lenora! And this was what fate had in store for thee! To hide thy noble birth under the humble roof of a mechanic; to seek a refuge from insult and contempt far from thy childhood's home; to work without relaxation; to fight against privation and want, and to sink at last into shame and poverty, heart-broken by despair! Misery, doubtless, has cast a yellow tinge upon thy cheeks and stolen its radiance from thy glance. But no! thank God, it is not so! Thy heroic blood has strengthened thee against fate, and thy beauty is even more ravishing than of old! If a cloistered

life has chastened thy roses, their tender bloom has only become more touching. Thy brow has grown loftier and purer; thine eyes still glisten beneath their sweeping lashes; and that well-remembered smile still hovers around thy coral lips!

Suddenly Lenora stopped working. Her hands rested on the work in her lap, her head bent forward, her eyes were riveted dreamily on the ground, and her soul, wandering perhaps to other lands, seemed to abandon itself on the current of a happy reverie. After a while she placed the linen she had been sewing on a chair and got up slowly. Leaning languidly on the window-frame, she gathered a few violets, played with them a while, and then looked abroad at the sky over the roof-tops, as if longing to breathe once more the fresh air and enjoy the spring. Soon her eyes fixed themselves compassionately on the bird that hopped about its cage and ever and anon struck its bill against the wires as if striving to get out.

"Why dost thou want to leave us, dear little bird?" said she, softly. "Why dost thou wish to be gone, dear comforter of our sadness? Sing gayly to-day; father is well again, and life is once more a pleasure. What is it makes thee flutter about so wildly and pant in thy cage? Ah! is it not hard, dear little one, to be captive when we know there are joy and freedom in the open air?—when we are born in the fields and woods?—when we know that *there* alone are independence

and liberty. Like thee, poor bird, I am a child of nature; I too have been torn from my birth-place; I too bemoan the solitudes where my childhood was passed! But has a friend or lover been snatched from thee—as from me—forever? Dost thou grieve for something more than space and freedom? Yet why do I ask? Thy love-season has come round again, has it not? and love is the greatest blessing of thy little life! I understand thee, poor bird! I will no longer be thy fate! Fly away, and God help you! Begone, and enjoy the two greatest blessings of life! Ah, how thou singest as thy wings bear thee away,—away to the sky and woods! Farewell! farewell!" As she uttered these last words Lenora opened the cage-door and released the bird, which darted away like an arrow. After this she resumed her work and sewed on with the same zeal as before, till aroused by the sound of footsteps on the staircase.

"It is father! God grant he may have been lucky to-day!"

Monsieur De Vlierbeck entered the room with a roll of paper in his hand, and, throwing himself languidly into a chair, seemed altogether worn out with fatigue. He had become very thin; his eyes were sunk in their sockets, his cheeks were pale, and his whole expression was changed and broken. It was very evident that sickness or depression, or perhaps both, had made fearful ravages on his body as well as spirits.

The poor old gentleman was wretchedly clad. It was evident that he had striven as formerly to conceal his indigence, for there was not a stain or grain of dust on his garments; but the stuff was threadbare and patched, and all his garments were too large for his shrunken limbs.

Lenora looked at him a moment anxiously. "You do not feel ill, father, do you?"

"No, Lenora," replied he; "but I am very wretched."

Lenora said nothing, but embraced him tenderly and then knelt down with his hand in hers.

"Father," said she, "it is hardly a week since you were ill in bed: we prayed to God for your restoration, and he listened to our prayers; you are cured, dear father, and yet you give way anew at the first disappointment. You have not been successful to-day, father? I see it in your face. Well, what of it? Why should it interfere with our happiness? We have long learned how to fight against fate. Let us be strong and look misery in the face with heads up: courage is wealth; and so, father dear, forget your disappointment. Look at me. Am I sad? do I allow myself to be downcast and despairing? I suffered and wept enough when you were ill; but, now that you are well again, come what may, your Lenora will always thank God for his goodness!"

The poor old man smiled feebly at the courageous excitement of his daughter.

"Poor child!" said he; "I understand very well

how you strive to appear strong in order to keep me up. May heaven repay your love, dear angel whom God has given me! your word and smile control me so completely that I may say a part of your soul passes with them into mine. I came home just now quite heart-broken and half crazy with despair; but you, my child, have restored me to myself again."

"That's right, father," said she, rising from her knees and sitting down on a chair close beside him; "come, father, tell me now all your adventures to-day, and afterward I will tell you something that will make you laugh."

"Alas, my child! I went to Monsieur Roncevaux's academy to resume my English lessons; but during my sickness an Englishman was put in my place: we have lost our best bit of bread."

"Well, how is it about Mademoiselle Pauline's German lesson?"

"Mademoiselle Pauline has gone to Strasburg and will not come back again. You see, Lenora, that we are losing every thing at once; so, have I not cause to be anxious and downcast? This news seems to overcome you, my child, strong as you are!"

In truth, Lenora was somewhat appalled by the dejecting words; but her father's remark restored her self-possession, and she replied, with a forced smile,—

"I was thinking, father, of the pain these dismissals gave you, and they really annoyed me.

Yet there are some things that ought to make me happy to-day. Yes, father, I have some good news for you!"

"Indeed? You astonish me!"

Lenora pointed to the chair.

"Do you see that linen?" said she. "I have a dozen fine shirts to make out of it; and when they are done there are as many more waiting for me. They pay me good wages, and I think, from what they say, that in time there will be something better in store for me. But as yet that is only a hope,—only a hope."

De Vlierbeck seemed particularly struck by the last remark of his daughter, as he looked at her anxiously.

"Well! well! what is it that makes you so happy and hopeful?" said he.

Lenora took up her sewing again and went busily to work.

"You wouldn't guess it in a week, father! Do you know who gave me this work? It is the rich lady who lives in the house with a court-yard, at the corner of our street. She sent for me this morning, and I went to her while you were abroad. You are surprised, father; are you not?"

"I am, indeed, Lenora. You are speaking of Madame De Royan, for whom you were employed to embroider those handsome collars. How does she come to know you?"

"I really don't know. Perhaps the person who gave me her collars to embroider told her who

worked them: she must have spoken to her about your illness and our poverty, for Madame De Royan knows more of us than you imagine.'

"Heavens! She does not know——"

"No! she knows nothing about our *name* or from whence we came."

"Go on, Lenora; you excite my curiosity. I see you want to teaze me to-day!"

"Well, father, if you are tired I will cut my story short. Madame De Royan received me with great kindness, complimented me on my embroidery, asked me some questions about our misfortunes, and consoled and encouraged me generously. 'Go, my child!' said she, as she gave me the linen; 'work with a good will and be prudent: I will protect you. I have a great deal of sewing to do,—enough for two months at least. But that would not be enough; I mean to recommend you to all my friends, and I mean to see that you are paid for your work in such a way that your father and yourself shall be above want.' I took her hand and kissed it, for I was touched by the delicacy with which she give me *work* and not *alms!* Madame De Royan understood me, and, laying her hand kindly on my shoulder, 'Keep up your spirits, Lenora,' said she; 'the time will come when you must take apprentices to help you, and so by degrees you will become mistress of a shop.' Yes, father, that's what she said; I know her words by heart."

With this she sprang to her father, embraced him, and added, with considerable emotion,—

"What say you to it, father? Is it not good news? Who knows what may come to pass? Apprentices,—a shop,—a store,—a servant: you will keep the books and buy our goods, I will sit in the room and superintend the workwomen! How sweet it is to be happy and to know that we owe all to the work of our hands! Then, father, your promise will indeed be fulfilled, and then you may pass your old days happily."

There was a look of such extreme serenity in Monsieur De Vlierbeck's face, an expression of such vivid happiness was reflected from his wrinkled cheeks, that it was evident he had allowed his daughter's story to bewitch him into entire forgetfulness. But he soon found it out, and shook his head mournfully at the enchantress:—

"Oh! Lenora, Lenora, you witch! how easily have you managed to seduce me! I followed your words like a child, and I really believed in the happiness you promised. But let us be serious. The shoemaker spoke to me again about the rent, and asked me to pay it. We still owe him twenty francs, do we not?"

"Yes, twenty francs for rent, and about twelve francs to the grocer: that's all. When the shirts are done we will give my wages on account to the shoemaker, and I know he will be satisfied. The grocer is willing to give us longer credit. I re-

ceived two francs and a half for my last work. You see very well, father, that we are still quite rich, and before a month is over will be out of debt entirely."

Poor De Vlierbeck seemed quite consoled; and a gleam of fortitude shone in his black eyes as he approached the table, unrolling the paper he had brought with him on his return.

"I have something to do too, Lenora. Professor Delsaux gave me some pieces of music to copy for his pupils, which will give me four francs in a couple of days. And now be quiet a while, my dear child; my nerves are so shattered that if we talk I shall make mistakes and spoil the paper."

"I may sing, father; may I not?"

"Oh, yes; that won't annoy me: your song will please my ear without distracting my attention."

The old gentleman went on writing, while Lenora, with a rich and joyous voice, repeated all her songs and poured forth her heart in melody. She sewed meanwhile diligently, and, from time to time, glanced at her father to see whether the cloud had fallen again over his face and spirit.

They had been a considerable time engaged with their several occupations, when the parish clock struck; and, putting down her work hastily, Lenora took a basket from behind the stove and prepared to go out. Her father looked up with surprise as he said,—

"What! *already*, Lenora?"

"It has just struck half-past eleven, father."

Without making any other remark, De Vlierbeck bent his head again over the music-paper and continued his task.

Lenora soon returned from her walk with her basket full of potatoes and something else tied up in a paper, which she hid beneath a napkin. Then, pouring some water in a pot which she placed beside her chair, she began to sing, and threw in the potatoes as she peeled them. After this she kindled a fire in the stove and set the pot of potatoes to boil. After the fire burned well she put a skillet, with a little butter and a good deal of vinegar, over the coals.

Up to this moment her father had not looked up nor intermitted his work; he saw her getting dinner ready every day, and it was seldom that any variety of food appeared on their table. But, hardly had the potatoes begun to boil, when an agreeable perfume was diffused through the chamber. De Vlierbeck glanced up from his writing, a little reproachfully, as he exclaimed,—

"What! meat on Friday, my child? you know very well we must be economical."

"Don't be angry, father," answered Lenora; "the doctor ordered it."

"You are trying to deceive me, are you not?"

"No, no; the doctor said you required meat at least three times a week, if we could get it; it will do you more good than any thing else in restoring your strength."

"And yet we are in debt, Lenora!"

"Come, come, father, let our debts alone; everybody will be paid and satisfied. Don't trouble yourself about them any more: I'll answer for them all. And now be so good as to take your papers off of the table, so that I can lay the cloth."

De Vlierbeck got up and did as he was asked. Lenora covered the deal-boards with a snowy napkin and placed on it two plates and a dish of potatoes. It was indeed an humble table, at which all was extremely common; yet every thing was so neat, fresh, and savory, that a rich man might have sat down to it with appetite. They took their places and asked a blessing on the meal; but, before the prayer was finished, Lenora started suddenly and interrupted her father. With eyes staring toward the door and head leaned forward, she listened eagerly, motioning her father with her hand to be silent.

There was a sound of footsteps and voices on the staircase, and, as they approached, Lenora thought she recognised the tones. She bounded to the door with a sharp cry, and, closing it, leaned against the boards to prevent any one from entering.

"For God's sake, child, what are you afraid of?" cried her father.

"GUSTAVE! GUSTAVE!" whispered Lenora, with pale and quivering lips. "He is there! he is there! I hear him. Take away that table quickly.

Of all the world he is the last who should see our misery!"

De Vlierbeck's face grew dark, his head became erect and fierce, and his eyes flashed with their ancient fire. Advancing silently to his daughter, he drew her from the door. Lenora fled to a corner of the room, and covered her face, which was red with mortification.

Suddenly the door opened, and a young man rushed into the chamber with an exclamation of joy as he advanced, open-armed, toward the trembling girl, whom he would have pressed to his breast had not the hand and look of her father arrested his steps.

For a moment he stood like one stupefied, glancing from the wretched board to the miserable dress of the old man and his daughter. The sight affected the intruder, for he covered his eyes as he exclaimed, in subdued and despairing tones, "Oh, God! has it come to this?"

But he did not allow himself to remain long under the influence either of his feelings or of her father, and, advancing anew to Lenora, seized and pressed both her hands ardently.

"Oh! look at me, Lenora! Let me see if thy heart has preserved the memory of our love!"

Lenora's eyes met his at once and with affection. It was a look that completely revealed her pure and constant soul.

"Oh, happiness!" cried Gustave, enthusiastically; "thou art still my dear and tender Lenora!

Thank God, no power on earth can ever separate me again from my betrothed! Receive, receive the kiss of our union!

He stretched his arms toward her. Lenora, trembling with agony and happiness, stood downcast and blushing, as if awaiting the solemn kiss; but, before Gustave could accomplish the act, De Vlierbeck was by his side, and, grasping his hand, held him motionless.

"Monsieur Denecker," said her father, severely, "have the goodness to moderate your transports. We are certainly glad to see you once more; but neither you nor I can forget what we are. Respect our poverty!"

"What do you say?" cried Gustave. "*What you are!* You are my friend,—my father. Lenora is my betrothed! Oh heaven! why look at me so reproachfully?"

He seized the hand of Lenora again, and, drawing her toward her father, rapidly continued:—

"Listen! My uncle died in Italy and left me heir of all his property. He commanded me on his death-bed to marry Lenora. I have searched heaven and earth to find you. I have suffered for many months all the torture that a nature like mine can endure; and at length I have discovered you! I have come, sir, to ask the reward of my suffering. I lay my fortune, heart, and life at your feet; and, in exchange, I implore the happiness of leading Lenora to the altar. Grant me that favor, O my *father!* Grinselhof awaits

you. I bought it for you. Every thing is there again. The portraits of your ancestors are in their places on the wall, and every thing that was dear to you is restored. Come! let me watch your old days, your declining years, with the veneration of a son! let me make you happy again;—oh, how happy!"

The old man's expression did not change, yet a tear moistened his eye.

"Ah!" continued Gustave, "nothing on earth can again separate me from her,—not even a father's power; for I feel that God himself has given her to me! Yet pardon me, father, for my rashness, and bestow your benediction!"

De Vlierbeck seemed to have utterly forgotten the young man and his transports; for he stood with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven, as if addressing his Maker in fervent prayer. At length his words began to be heard distinctly:—

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret! rejoice on the bosom of God. My promise is fulfilled;—thy child will be happy!"

Gustave and Lenora stood before him hand in hand; and, as he threw his arms around the young man,—

"May Heaven bless you for your love!" continued he. "Make my child happy. She is your wife!"

"Gustave, Gustave,—*my husband!*" exclaimed Lenora, as they threw themselves into each other's

arms, and the first kiss of love—the first consecrated kiss—was exchanged on the breast of that happy father, who wept over and blessed his children.

And now, gentle reader, I must inform you that I have had my own reasons for concealing the situation and even the true name of the *château* of De Vlierbeck. None of you will, therefore, ever know where Gustave and Lenora dwell. I know Monsieur and Madame Denecker intimately, and have taken many a walk around Grinselhof with two charming little children and their venerable *grandfather*. I have often beheld the beautiful picture of peace, love, and domestic happiness that is seen in that old house beneath the grim ancestral portraits or in the fresh air under the trees. I will not say who told me the story of this family. Let it suffice that I know all the persons who have played a part in it, and that I have often chatted with Farmer John and Dame Bess while they poured forth their gossip about "The Poor Gentleman" and his trials.

THE END.

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